

# Calendar of Simple Pleasures in New England Nature



## JANUARY

- Look for bald eagles perched near the mouths of the region's large rivers, utilizing the ice-free water for fishing.
- Spot a snowy owl amid the icy, tundra-like expanse of one of New England's large, coastal marshes, or even Boston's Logan Airport.
- Take a quiet walk along a woodland edge after a fresh snowfall and look for various animal tracks and other signs of activity.
- Great-horned owls are mating at this time. Listen for their hoots from mixed woods (deciduous and evergreen) throughout the night.

## APRIL

- Witness the spectacular courtship display of woodcocks along the edges of moist fields bordered by forests.
- Head for the coast to see northern gannets, large white seabirds, dive-bombing and plunging headlong in the water in pursuit of fish.
- On mild evenings, listen for the chirp-like call of spring peepers throughout wet, wooded areas.
- Snakes and turtles are emerging from winter dens. Look for them basking in sunny spots, particularly on south-facing slopes and logs.

## JULY

- Find adult toads in the garden, or tiny, black, baby toads on moist soil near water, such as the shoulders of old dirt roads.
- Look for dragonfly exuviae (exoskeletal remains left after moulting). They can be found on tall grasses near lakes and ponds.
- Watch for monarch butterflies feeding on milkweed blossoms.
- Notice the blue and purple flowers of chicory blooming along the roadsides.

## OCTOBER

- Notice oak leaves as they lose chlorophyll and begin to change color. They will typically begin falling within several weeks.
- Listen for the last calls of meadow crickets on warm days.
- Visit a cranberry bog and witness the harvesting process.
- Listen for noisy flocks of white snow geese overhead as they head south, or look for them resting in large fields.

## FEBRUARY

- Listen for the howls and yelps of coyotes, particularly vocal in late winter; their sounds carrying across the cold night air.
- Seemingly eager for spring's arrival, chickadees and tufted titmice begin their spring songs, whistling "Phoebe" and "Peter" respectively.
- The leafless trees of winter make it an ideal season to see (and hear) the impressive, crow-sized, pileated woodpecker.
- Skunks (and raccoons and opossums) emerge from their dens to mate. Listen for their territorial squabbles at night.

## MAY

- Yellow warblers and black & white warblers return from their southern wintering areas and can be heard singing from breeding territories.
- On mild, rainy nights, look for frogs and salamanders crossing roads as they travel to nearby breeding ponds.
- Spring bird migration is in full swing. Watch the sky and treetops at dawn and dusk for migrating birds.
- In coastal areas, this is the height of shorebird's northward migration. Watch them feeding as they fuel up along this tremendous journey.

## AUGUST

- Wade in calm, protected, coastal waters on a dark night and witness the magical sparkling of bioluminescent plankton all around you.
- Look for praying mantises in the garden or taller vegetation around the edges of parks and backyards.
- Take a boat ride to see majestic humpback whales (and other species) feeding in the waters of Stellwagon Bank National Marine Sanctuary.
- In coastal areas, see many species of migratory shorebirds feeding as they fuel up along their amazing journey to Central and South America.

## NOVEMBER

- Look up for late-migrating raptors, such as red-tailed and rough-legged hawks, soaring high overhead.
- Look for red dragonflies flying low over sunny meadows on warm days.
- White-tailed deer (and moose) are very active at this time. Be on the lookout for them grazing at road shoulders and licking excess road salt.
- At dusk, look for flocks of crows heading for their communal roost, where often many thousands will gather each night.

## MARCH

- Maple sugaring begins. Visit one of New England's many maple sugaring operations to taste the sweet syrup fresh from the source.
- Salamander migration begins about this time. Watch for them crossing roads in wooded areas on the first warm, rainy nights.
- Chipmunks emerge from their winter quarters. Look for them scurrying across woodpiles, stone walls, and fallen trees.
- One of the first spring migrants to return, phoebes begin arriving at their nesting grounds. Listen for the snappy, two-noted song.

## JUNE

- Look to the eastern sky shortly after dusk to find the Summer Triangle, formed by the trio of bright stars, Vega, Deneb, and Altair.
- Hear the ethereal sounds of loons calling from their nesting territories on inland lakes.
- Fireflies appear in grassy areas on warm, still evenings.
- Listen for the chorus of bullfrogs at night near ponds in rural areas.

## SEPTEMBER

- Enjoy the taste of fresh, local blueberries.
- Woolly bear caterpillars can be seen crossing sun-warmed roads.
- Watch for bears throughout more remote, wooded areas, as they are busily stuffing themselves with nuts and berries at this time.
- Monarch butterflies and large, green darner dragonflies are both migrating. Watch for them over sunny fields and gardens.

## DECEMBER

- Many overwintering birds form cooperative feeding flocks. Look for flocks of robins feeding on winter berries, such as Virginia creeper.
- Look for harbor seals hauled out on exposed rocks at low tide along the shorelines, particularly near the mouths of large rivers.
- On a clear night, look for Orion overhead, the most evident winter constellation in New England.
- Bundle up and enjoy a quiet walk in a nearby park or woods, while recalling a year filled with these and countless other natural pleasures.

