

ISSUE 2 | JANUARY 2019

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

IN THIS EDITION...

**FIND OUT HOW
DIFFERENT ANIMALS
SURVIVE IN WINTER**

**LEARN HOW WE'RE
TRACKING RHODE
ISLAND'S MOST
SECRETIVE MAMMAL**

**MEET THE
BOBCAT!**



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The Wild Rhode Island Explorer | Winter 2019

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Winter snow storm, Photo: M. Grande

Juniper tree. Photo: M. Grande

HABITAT CHAT

How do wild animals survive the winter?



Northern Cardinal.
Photo: M. Grande

The trees are bare, the air is cold, and you may have seen a few snowflakes falling. Winter has hit Rhode Island! For humans, wintertime habits might include drinking hot chocolate and going sledding. For wild animals, wintertime means survival time. Animals use many different strategies to survive the winter. Lots of animals leave the snow and ice behind and migrate south. Most of Rhode Island's songbirds head to the tropical rainforest for the winter, where there is plenty of food, and then make their way back for spring. The animals that tough out the winter here in New England have some amazing **adaptations** that help them survive!

Most of us probably think of hibernation first. **Hibernation** occurs when an animal goes to sleep for a long period of time, and their bodily functions slow down. Black bears are the most well-known hibernators, but did you know that bats, chipmunks, skunks, and woodchucks also hibernate?

Most **carnivores**, like foxes and coyotes, are active all winter long to hunt. They grow a thick winter coat to stay warm. Deer also stay active in the winter to search for food. During the winter, deer digest food slower than in the summer, and they rely on fat stored up in the fall for energy.

There are lots of other interesting winter survival strategies! Chickadees and nuthatches collect and hide food in the fall and must remember where they stashed it for a winter snack. Mice and voles burrow in the snow for cover. The weasel's fur changes from brown to white in the winter, helping it **camouflage** better in the snow. Garter snakes huddle together under logs to stay warm while they hibernate. One of the coolest survival strategies is used by the wood frog. Its entire body freezes, and its heart actually stops beating!

No matter what kind of survival strategy they use, all wild animals need food, water, shelter, and space to make it to spring!

MY FIRST HUNT



Pascal with mentor Jim Tappero.
Photos by Jamie Glowacki



by Pascal Dubuc

My mom asked me if I wanted to take part in a DEM youth waterfowl hunt. I had no idea what I was signing up to do but I said, "Sure, why not?"

We met the DEM mentors at the range. I was a little intimidated because I was the youngest and smallest. But I did pretty good. Shooting was fun and I thought, "Okay, I can do this."

About a week later, I started taking the hunter safety course. There was a lot of information; it felt a little overwhelming. But I just kept going. I passed my test, got my license, and my first firearm.

The morning of my first hunt was a nor'easter, which apparently is spectacular for duck hunting. We all met up and "we set sail" for the hunt. My mentors and I took a kayak out to the blind. We were there for about an hour setting up. We saw a few ducks fly past us and we knew we were ready. All of sudden, 3 birds landed in our decoy spread. One of the them was rather close, about 10 yards away. It was a drake (male) mallard. I fired once, and it went down. Then about 5 teal landed in our decoy spread. My mentor Jim Tappero told me to shoot the one on the right, and so I did. A few minutes later, more teal finished (landed) and I shot another one. Next, we saw a solo fly right above us, and I shot it midflight. It was a hen (female) pintail, which is one of the most uncommon ducks to harvest in RI. I shot two more teals and bagged my limit in 40 minutes!

After the hunt, we went back and learned how to skin the ducks and get the meat out. We had duck the next night for dinner and I was proud I provided food for us to eat.

And I'm now obsessed with duck hunting...Well, all hunting actually, and I can't wait to go again.



OUR WILD NEIGHBORS!

Bobcat

Scientific name: *Lynx rufus*

Range: Bobcats can be found in Canada, all over the United States, and in parts of Mexico.

Size: Bobcats can weigh between 13 and 30 pounds. Male bobcats are usually larger and heavier than females. From nose to tail, bobcats measure between 32 and 34 inches long, and stand about 22 inches high.

Habitat: Bobcats can live in lots of different habitats like swamps, grasslands, shrublands, forests, mountains, and farms.

Predators: In the western United States, adult bobcats are sometimes killed by mountain lions. In some states, people can legally hunt and trap bobcats. Young bobcats may be eaten by owls, coyotes, and bears.

Food: In New England, bobcats mainly eat rabbits, but will also eat squirrels, mice, chipmunks, woodchucks, and birds. Bobcats are also able to hunt deer in deep snow or when deer are resting. Bobcats hunt by stalking their prey, not by chasing it.

Breeding: The mating season is in February and March. Kittens are born in May or June. Mother bobcats will have between 2 and 5 kittens. Kittens will stay with their mother up to one year before heading out on their own!

DID YOU KNOW?

It is against the law to hunt or trap a bobcat in Rhode Island. Although people are seeing bobcats more often around the state, our biologists do not have enough information about our bobcat population to allow a hunting or trapping season. In fact, the bobcat is listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in our State Wildlife Action Plan. We only allow hunting and trapping of a species when we know that their population is strong and stable!

Photo: P. Topham





OUT IN THE FIELD

Tracking Rhode Island's Most Secretive Mammal

Mary Grande, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator



URI Researcher Amy Gottfried-Mayer readies a trapped bobcat for release in study conducted in 2017.

For the past five years, the Division of Fish and Wildlife has been on the lookout for one cool critter...It has sharp claws, great eyesight, spotted fur, and it is nearly impossible to catch—It's the bobcat! In recent years, Rhode Islanders from all over the state have been calling our office with reports of bobcat sightings. Our biologists wanted to learn how many bobcats we have in the state, and how far they are traveling. We teamed up with wildlife researchers at the University of Rhode Island and started our bobcat research project!

How can you gather information about the very shy and sneaky bobcat? To answer that question, I took a walk with Amy Gottfried-Mayer, one of our research partners from the University of Rhode Island...

Mary: Amy, what are some of the different ways you are gathering information about bobcats in Rhode Island?

Amy: The first way is by trapping bobcats and putting a GPS collar on them. This records where they are 12 times a day and we can use that information to figure out where their home range is, how far they move, and what habitats they like best. We also use trail cameras across the whole state to get a wider view of the bobcat population.

Mary: What kind of traps do you use? How many do you set at one time?

Amy: We use traps that look like large wire cages. One type has a single door on the end. When an animal gets to the back of the trap, the front door closes. The other type has 2 doors, one on each end. We can set those up on a trail so when an animal goes to pass through along a trail, it will hit a point in the middle of the trap that causes both doors to close at the same time. We usually have 10 to 12 traps set at a time. We can have more or fewer depending on how far apart they are and how many people we have helping to check the traps each day.

Mary: How often do you check the traps?

Amy: We check the traps twice a day when they are set. Once, first thing in the morning, and again before sunset in the afternoon. We are more likely to find animals in our traps during the morning check because most of the animals that would fit in the traps are more active at night.

Mary: What do you use to get the bobcats to walk into the trap? Is it hard to catch them?

Amy: It is very hard to catch them! They are very smart animals and learn quickly when something



Photo: M. Stultz

seems different in their environment. To get them interested in our traps we have a few tricks up our sleeves. We use scent lures with a couple of different “flavors.” Some smell like prey species, some smell like other bobcats, and we even use catnip scented lures. We also make our own “cat-toys” out of feathers, fur, shiny items, even googly eyes. Bobcats, like house cats, are usually quite interested in feathers or something that moves around, so we hang our cat toys in and around the trap to get their attention.

Mary: Do you ever catch other types of animals in the trap? What do you do with them?

Amy: We catch a lot of other neat animals. We have caught fishers, raccoons, skunks, opossums, a gray fox, a long-tailed weasel, and even a few house cats. We record on our data sheets which animals were in which traps for our records, and then they get released immediately. Skunks and opossums usually like to stay in the traps until night time, so we just rig the door open for them and let them leave on their own. Raccoons and fishers usually dart right out as soon as the door is opened!

Mary: So, say you’re successful and you catch a bobcat! What happens next?

Amy: When we catch a bobcat, the first thing is to anesthetize it. For everyone’s safety, and the bobcat’s safety, it needs to be asleep before we can handle it. Once the bobcat is fully asleep we measure its weight and take a bunch of body measurements like length and height. We identify the bobcat by attaching an ear tag and also take a small blood and tissue sample to study the DNA back in our lab. If the bobcat weighs enough, we also give it a GPS collar that allows us to follow all of its movements for up to a year. After about 45 minutes the bobcat wakes up, and once it is fully recovered, about 2 hours, we release it right where we caught it.

Mary: What is your favorite thing about being a biologist?

Amy: I love being outside, so getting to do that every day for a job is amazing but knowing that I am collecting information that will be used to help wildlife species is definitely the best part. Studying bobcats has been so exciting, and I feel so lucky that I have gotten to have an up close and personal look at such beautiful animals.

Mary: And lastly, what is your favorite Rhode Island wild animal? (Other than the bobcat!)

Amy: That is easy, river otters!! I have only seen them in the wild a handful of times, but I get so excited when I do. They are such interesting animals, and super cute too!



Above: Success! One of our bobcats in a trap in 2018; Below: Researchers take measurements of a bobcat trapped in 2017. (Photos: T. Langknecht)





THE CRITTER CAM

A trail camera is a small, waterproof camera that can be strapped to a tree. It takes photos when it senses something moving in front of the lens. Lots of people use trail cameras for many reasons. Wildlife biologists use camera “traps” to collect information about animal populations. Hunters use them to scout for the best place to hunt deer or turkey. Some people set them up just to see what kind of critters are living in their backyards. Even though trail cameras are used for many purposes, one thing is certain — they capture some cool photos!

CHECK OUT SOME WINTER PHOTOS CAPTURED FROM OUR BOBCAT CAM!



Sometimes our bobcat cameras take photos of things other than bobcats, like this great blue heron...or this runaway chicken!

(Photos: Amy Gottfried-Mayer)

CAPTION CONTEST

LAST ISSUE'S WINNING CAPTION

**"I'M HERE FOR
THE RUDOLPH
AUDITION..."**

- NAOMI S.



Send in a caption for this photo by February 7, 2019. We'll reveal the winning caption in our next issue! Submit your caption by clicking [here](#) or send an email to mary.grande@dem.ri.gov.

**CAPTION
THIS PIC!**



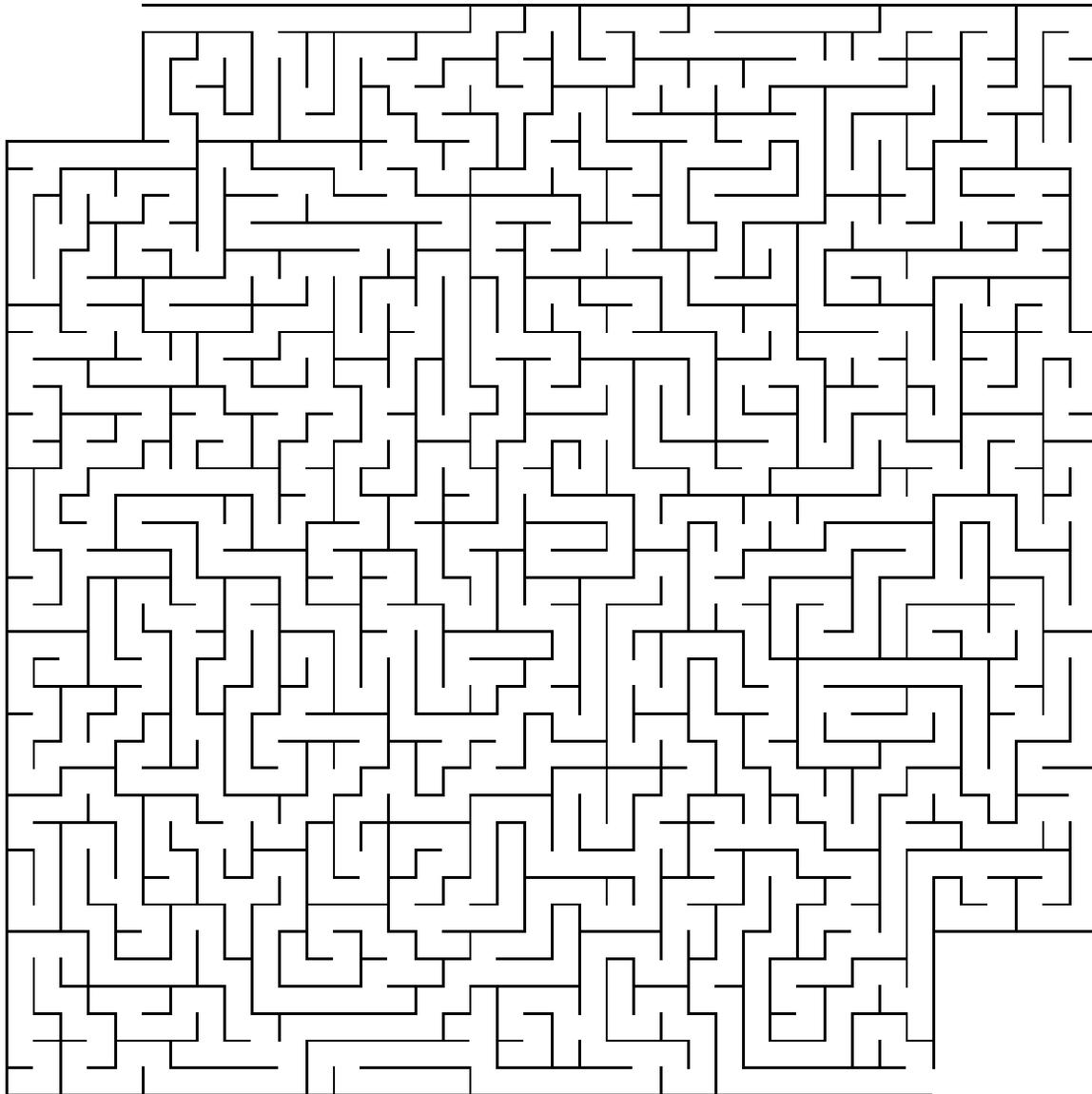
Photo: Brian Tarka



WILD QUEST!

FRAGMENTATION FRENZY

Imagine you are a bobcat traveling across the Rhode Island landscape. You try to stick to the natural habitat, but you have to cross roads, sneak through neighborhoods, and stay hidden from danger. You live in a place where there is a lot of **fragmentation**. This means that the habitat has been split up into lots of little chunks. Can you find your way through the fragmented habitat to find food, water, shelter, and open space?





CREATIVE CORNER



"I saw a red fox in my backyard" by Desmond



"I saw turkeys down from my house" by Landon



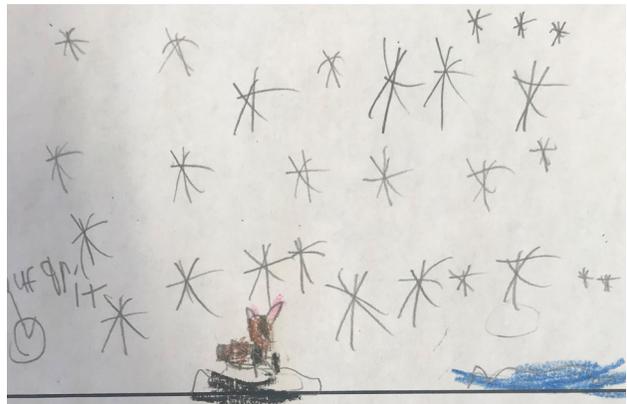
"I saw a deer" by Adi



"A fox" by Ella



"Animal tracks in the snow" by Alivia K.

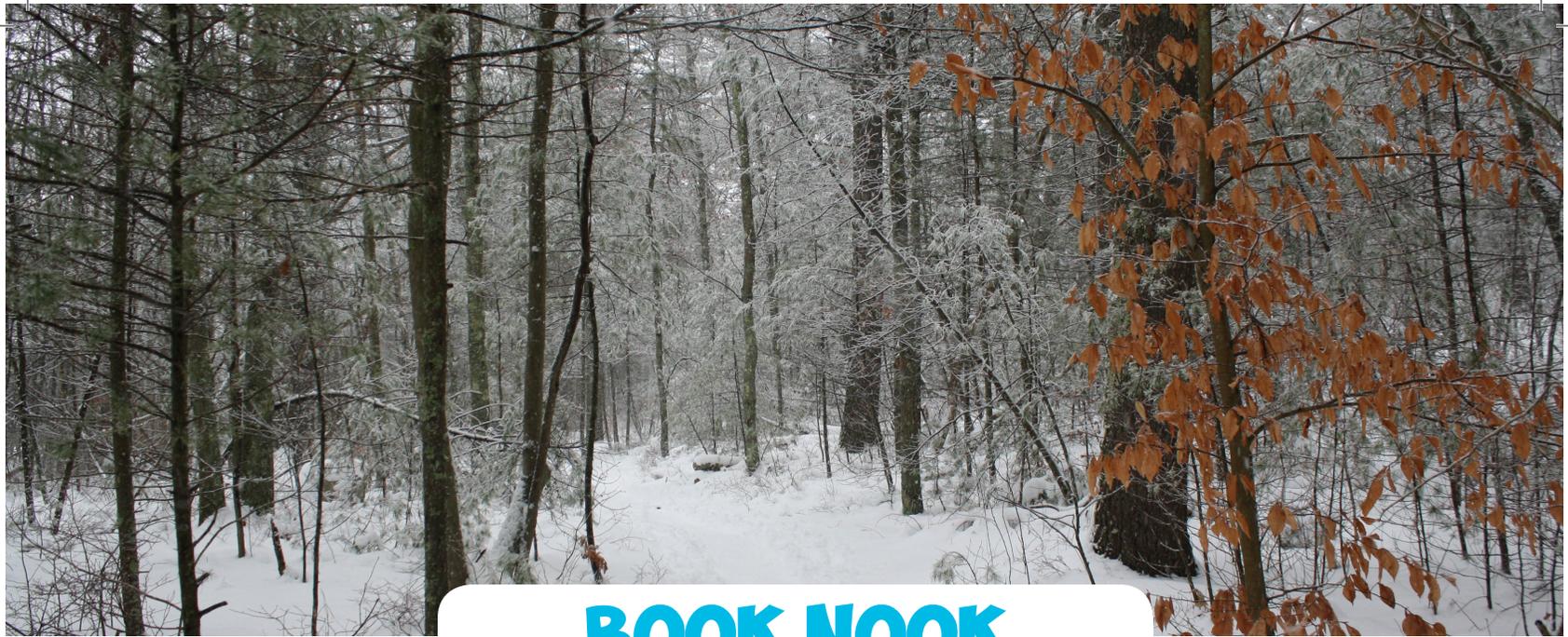


"I saw a baby deer" by Callie

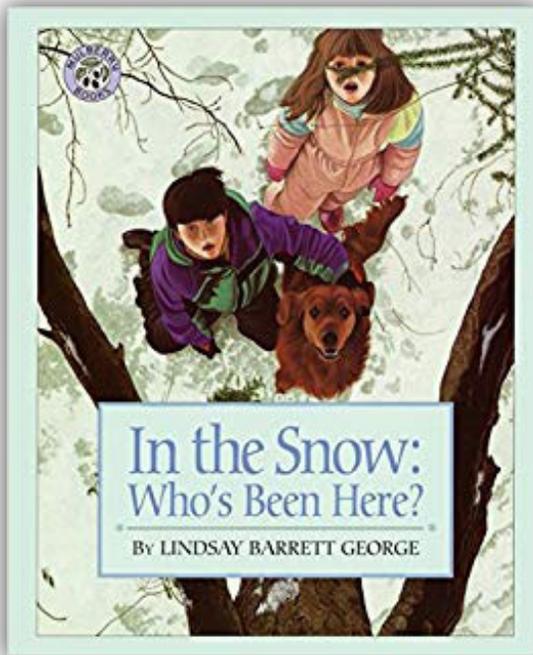
Send us your artwork and writing to be featured in our next issue!

The theme for our spring issue is: Nature's signs of springtime

If you would like to share your creative work, you can click [here](#) OR send an email to Mary.Grande@dem.ri.gov OR you can mail it. There's a lot of options!



BOOK NOOK



In this book, search for tracks and follow clues to discover winter wildlife!

Questions?

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Learn more at
dem.ri.gov/wildlifeoutreach



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