Bill Banaszewski

Watching for...

To survive winter, animals must be able to keep warm and find food and water. If they can't, they must adapt—change their habits to suit the conditions. Some animals migrate—move to a new area where it's easier to find food and stay warm. Others hibernate and sleep the cold months away.

FEEDING

Twigs bitten away hint that rabbits or deer have been by. Take a closer look at the bite. Are the twigs one to two feet from the ground cleanly bitten off at an angle? A rabbit has been eating. If the twig is bitten off but the cut is jagged, it's from a deer. (Deer tear twigs off as they bite.) Once in a while you may find a spot of blood where one animal has caught another. On very rare occasions, you may even find the "leftovers" from a meal. A bit of fur or feathers, or some other part of the prey (animal that is killed and eaten by another animal), left behind when the predator (animal that kills and eats other animals) was scared away or had its fill.

Hidden Treasures

Most insects spend the winter as eggs or pupae. Egg cases and cocoons can be found by looking closely at plant stems or the underside of leaves which remain on trees and shrubs. The egg case from a praying mantis is straw-colored and looks like a piece of shredded wheat breakfast cereal about the size of a child's thumb. They can be found attached to stems of tall grasses and weeds, especially in overgrown fields.

frost-covered egg case from a praying mantis

Dave Speir

Tracks

A dusting of fresh snow is ideal for looking at tracks. Footprints tell us what kind of animal passed by. If we look closely, we can often figure out what the animal was doing. Squirrels and rabbits often leave tracks criss-crossing the yard. Follow the tracks to see where they lead. They may reveal an animal searching for food, perhaps even following another animal.

A great place to look for tracks is near a bird feeder. Birds sometimes hop in the snow under the feeder. Squirrels, mice and voles visit too, often eating the seeds that have fallen to the ground.

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