

The Naturalist's Winter Almanac

By Staff Naturalist Doug Hitchcox



BOHEMIAN WAXWING
Photo: Kirk Rogers

December

2 This is a great time to visit Maine's rocky coast and look for the state-threatened **HARLEQUIN DUCK**, one of the most beautiful ducks in the world. Look for the red, white, and blue colors of a drake as it surfaces in the surf, before diving for food like crabs and barnacles.



Photo: Nick Lund

13 The **GEMINIDS** Meteor Shower will peak tonight. This is one of the largest showers we get, and with the recent new moon, the sky will be dark and optimal for viewing the meteors.

14 The Christmas Bird Counts begin today. This is the longest running contributory science project, now in its 124th year! Check out maineaudubon.org/cbc to find a circle near you that you can participate in.

19 Even during these cold days you may see flies, like the large **BLUE BOTTLE FLY**, cruising around in sunny spots. These flies are only in their adult stage for two weeks but can hibernate during cold snaps.

22 Happy Winter Solstice! Today marks the moment when the Earth's tilt, on its axis, offers those of us in the northern hemisphere the shortest day and longest night of the year.

January

1 Time to set your New Year's resolutions. Can you set a goal for 2024 that will benefit Maine's wildlife? Try switching to bird-friendly shade-grown coffee, or pick some native plants to add to your garden.

7 Mountain-ash berry crops are poor in the eastern Boreal forest this winter, so be on the lookout for **BOHEMIAN WAXWINGS**. They can often be found around any fruit-bearing trees in the winter, especially those planted near urban environs.

12 **WHITE-TAILED DEER** bucks are shedding their antlers. Now is a great time to look for them as they are easy to spot against the snow.



16 Watch for **BALD EAGLES** carrying sticks onto their nests. Each year they'll add to and reinforce their nests, and it may be a just matter of days before their first eggs are laid!

29 Maine has five species of bats that spend the winter here by hibernating in caves, talus slopes, and sometimes in man-made structures.

February

1 Did you know that this is "Responsible Pet Owners Month"? We didn't either but it is a great reminder to keep your cats indoors and help save the one-billion-plus birds that are killed each year by outdoor cats.

4 The **STELLER'S SEA-EAGLE** returned to Georgetown, Maine, for its second winter on this day in 2023. Has it returned yet again?

16-19 The Great Backyard Bird Count is this weekend. Identify, count, and submit a list of the birds you see to help scientists better understand and protect birds around the world.

22 On average, each spring, **RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS** migrate back to Maine a little bit early. These 'near-migrants' can react to changing temperatures and return as soon as conditions are ready. It's a race for the best breeding grounds!

27 The **GRAY SQUIRREL** mating season has begun. Watch for them carrying materials up trees to build their nests, also called dreys.

