

Wildtales' Country Journal

by Heather A. Wallis Murphy ©2003



February: The month of making amends for wrongdoing; reconciliation; originally a Roman festival of purification (Webster's Dictionary). February's birth flower is the Violet, and the birthstone is the Amethyst.

February Dates to Celebrate:

- 1st of February Chinese New Year of the Ram,
- 11th Sacagawea gave birth to a baby boy 1805.
- 22nd George Washington born 1732.
- 2nd Groundhogs Day,
- 12th Abraham Lincoln born 1809.
- 26th M. Lewis described mountain beavers 1806.
- 7th Laura Ingalls Wilder born 1867.
- 14th St. Valentine's Day,
- 17th Presidents' Day,
- 20th Ansel Adams born 1902.
- 16th Full Moon,
- 20th Copernicus born 1473.
- 27th Henry Wadsworth Longfellow born 1807.

Nature Tales - Listen for the "hoo hooing" in the deep of night, as great-horned owls pair-up, selecting woodland nest sites this month. Wild canines such as coyotes begin to den - catch their yipping on the full moon. Deer and elk are on winter ranges in inland habitats of shrub steppe or in temperate forests near coastal waters. Mountain goats and bighorn sheep move to steep windswept rocky slopes, with southern exposures, to embrace the winter sun.

Migratory birds winter in southern U.S., Mexico, Central and South Americas - if you travel south this month look for our hummingbirds, warblers, swallows, tanagers and osprey.

Northwest resident birds remain active all winter. The American dipper is found solitary along our rivers, trilling their musical notes. Trusty finches such as the bright American goldfinch, the small pine siskin, the novel red crossbill, the eye-catching evening grosbeak, and the faithful house finch live in woods and near feeders - always on the watch for predators: pygmy owls, Merlin, sharp-shinned and red-tailed hawks.

Frogs, lizards and insects are in winter dormancy, insulated in their natural habitats. Hibernation is in full force as many mammals have quieted down, living in winter "dens" - black bears,

bats, marmots (our version of the groundhog), golden-mantled ground squirrels, and chipmunks.

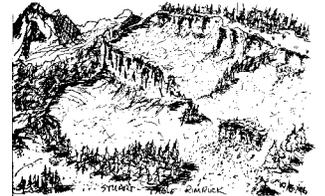


One intriguing winter behavior is that of the cute little pika. On a winters' day, a muffled "eenk" may be heard deeply sheltered under the snow. Lively all winter, pikas run between tunnels and chambers in their boulder-field homes. Diet is from their summer's

work - piles of dry hay composed of lupine, Jacob's ladder, fescues, avens, and fir needles. These haystacks tide them over winter. Pikas emerge in spring, as the snows recede upon talus mountainsides.

Winter mammals leave behind animal evidence, from which investigators can determine the wildlife species and diet. Wildlife sign includes: the twig-chewings of beaver, porcupine, snowshoe hare, and mountain beavers; the scat of raccoon, striped skunk, marten and bobcat; the river slides of the otter; or the seed caches of the nuthatch. Tracking wildlife is at its best, over fresh snow in the mountains and on soft mud in the low country, during the month of February.

* Heather is a new contributing feature writer, beginning this month. She is an artist, nature writer and practicing wildlife biologist from Leavenworth, Washington. She also runs "Walleye Cards from Wildtales.com" a naturalist notecard, postcard, bookmark and journal business found in stores across the Northwest OR online at www.wildtales.com.



THE WEATHER FROM HOME

Like the pika, you're snug beneath blankets of snow inside your chambers or, rummaging the cupboards for preserves. — *Ochotona princeps*

Same as the dipper, you're safe watching the pounding drops from beneath a tree or, looking out from deep within your sheltered home. — *Cinclus mexicanus*

Akin with the siskin, you hear the music of the highlands from your comfy perch or, while creeping through the blustery pines. — *Carduelis pinus*

With the swallows, you're soaring great horizons in dreams of summer's cool waters or hunkered on the line with friends. — *Hirundo rustica*
—Heather A. Wallis Murphy, 1998.

