



UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE **Cooperative Extension**

Wildlife Weather the Storm

January's ice storm that snapped trees and power lines and coated much of New Hampshire with a thick coat of ice may have actually helped some wildlife populations. The fallen hardwood branches full of buds and tender twigs provide an abundant and easily accessible food supply for deer, moose, and snowshoe hare. Hemlocks, spruces, and firs, critical winter cover for these mammals, came through the storm relatively unscathed. Songbirds, which rely on seeds and buds for winter food, likely had difficulty chiseling through the ice-encased branches during and after the storm. Look for more bird activity at backyard feeders while the ice remains.

Small mammals, such as mice and voles, spend much of the winter tunneling beneath the snow, out of reach of their predators - coyotes, foxes, weasels, hawks, and owls. These predators may find their prey out of reach beneath the crusty snow unless an unfortunate mouse or vole ventures to the surface. Bobcats can move about easily on crusty snow, while deep fluffy snow hurts their hunting abilities. Wild turkeys, able to travel long distances, should find something to eat.

The most noticeable impact on wildlife and their habitats will likely be the sudden creation of lots of dead, dying and downed wood. The fallen and damaged hardwoods allow more light to reach the forest floor. Over the next few years, wildflowers, grasses, shrubs and tree seedlings will emerge in these sunlit openings. In spring many wildlife species will be drawn to these openings in search of fresh green growth and juicy berries.

Birds that nest in tree cavities, such as woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees, will have more trees to choose from for nesting and foraging. More dead wood on the forest floor often leads to an increase in insect abundance. Since insects are important food sources for birds and their offspring, more insects may lead to more birds.

One of the missing habitat features in our woodlands today, is a large amount of fallen woody debris of all sizes. The ice storm created a bonanza for creatures that inhabit the forest floor, Salamanders, frogs, snakes and other small animals will

find refuge under and in this debris. Landowners don't need to spend any money to create this habitat, the ice storm did it for us. Leaving fallen woody debris throughout the forest floor is better for wildlife than "cleaning up the woods". Concern about increased forest fire danger may be valid, however, fallen wood may pick up sufficient moisture to minimize fire hazards.

Our native wildlife is adapted to the ever-changing nature of the New England landscape. The ice storm was just the latest in a continuous cycle of natural and human-induced disturbances. Typical of most natural disturbances, the storm's impacts were patchy across the state. This creates a mosaic of habitat conditions from new growth to older forests, suitable to a rich diversity of plants and animals.

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Sources: Eric Aldrich, NH Fish and Game; Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife; Mariko Yamasaki, US Forest Service.**