

## WINTER IN PROVINCIAL PARKS

During the winter months, Provincial Parks go through a change in energy expenditure. Although they remain open, the parks are no longer actively catering to vacationers. The obvious exceptions are Brudenell River and Mill River Provincial Parks, which have cross-country skiing and snowshoe programs, and Brookvale Provincial Ski Park, which has downhill and cross-country skiing.

An education program consisting of snowshoe trails and associated literature has been developed with the cooperation of the Department of Education. This program is oriented to grades four and six, although it would be of interest to any student or youth organization. An associated program consisting of school visitations with animal specimens provides an opportunity to discuss ecology and how the animals of Provincial Parks cope with their energy expenditures.

To most animal species, the winter presents the time of greatest stress - they must obtain food as well as combat the cold. The exceptions are those animals which hibernate or fly south. Even though food is scarcer, consumption must increase to counteract the new energy expended in keeping warm. For young animals, this is combined with energy expenditures for growth.

Some small animals remain under the snow, making use of its insulating capacity to protect them from extreme low temperatures. Animals such as mink, weasels and shrews count on their high metabolic rate to produce heat to fend off the cold. This means, however, that they must have a high food consumption.

Water animals, such as muskrat and beaver, count on the heat contained in water (it doesn't drop below 0° C) to offset very low air temperatures. For the large land animals, such as foxes, their thickened coat of fur help keep them warm.

For the imported raccoons and skunks, the winter consists of a shallow hibernation or dormancy during severe cold periods with bouts of active searching for food during warm, sunny days.

If you or your group would like to know more about any of the animals, or any Provincial Park winter program, please contact Provincial Parks at 892-7431.

