

Winter in P.E.I.'s Provincial Parks

Were there days this winter or past winters when you wished the sun would come out and melt the snow away, even if the temperatures plummeted afterwards? Who cares if it is -20°C , if we can only get rid of those mounds of snow.

By wishing this, not only are you antagonizing skiers and snowshoers who frequent our Provincial Parks, but you are wishing doom and hardship on many of our Island small beasties.

For mice the snow provides insulation from extreme cold, something like a puff on your bed. Even if the air temperature drops to -25 , the temperature under the snow drops only a few degrees below freezing. In addition to permitting the mice to decrease the energy they must expend in staying warm, they are not as prone to being gobbled up by "Reddy the Fox." When we get a mid-winter warm spell and the snow disappears, the mice have much less protection and are more easily found by foxes, mink, hawks and owls. Even your house cat and wild ones too join in ^{on} this readily available food source. Mice which have frozen to death are also eaten by predators. The mice must still move around and find food, but they no longer have a protective blanket.

When the mouse population is excessively depleted at some point during the winter, fewer mice will be available in the spring, when predators need extra energy for raising young. This can lead to fewer young being born, and fewer young surviving.

So, next time you wake up on a Saturday or Sunday, instead of wishing the snow away, put your cross-country skis in the back of your car and head to the nearest Provincial Park. If you do not have skis and want to rent them, or if you want tracked trails, head for Mill River Provincial Park, Brudenell River Provincial Park or Brookvale Provincial Ski Park. For the more speed inclined, wanting downhill skiing or those wanting to try tobogganing or sliding down a hill on an inner tube, Brookvale Provincial Ski Park is the place to be where all of this equipment is available for rent or you can bring your own.

In any event, don't wish the snow away and a hard life for mice, go out and enjoy the snow for soon it will be spring.