

Animal Survival in Winter

As it gets colder outside, humans turn on the heat and put on coats to stay warm. Many of us also insulate our homes to keep them warmer and to use less energy for heating. Insulation is something that keeps heat from escaping. In many cases it traps air inside, which reduces heat loss to the outside.

How do animals survive the winter? Animals in cold climates have adapted to stay warm and many of them use insulation just like humans do. Have you ever seen a bird that looks big and puffy? Birds fluff out their feathers to stay warmer. By increasing the layer of air near their bodies, they lose less heat.

Do you ever see deer near your home? The local deer population also has winter adaptations. The deer have a different coat in winter than they do in summer. Their winter hair has air pockets inside that traps air and keeps them warm. They also eat more in the late summer and fall. This puts on a layer of fat in the fall to help insulate them in the winter, as well as protect them when food supplies are scarce.

Smaller animals such as mice burrow under the snow. While it can be well-below freezing above the snow, underneath it is only just at freezing temperatures. The snow acts as insulation to keep the animals warmer. It also helps protect them from predators by allowing them to move around without being seen. If there is snow, look for small tracks leading to a hole. But don't disturb the hole or any tunnels! It takes energy for the animals to build these homes and we don't want to make them use more by having to rebuild them.



Animal tracks leading to a protected place

Go outside and look for evidence of animals using winter insulation.

- Put on your own layers of insulation! Coats, snow pants, and hats all trap air near our bodies and insulate us just like the birds with puffy feathers.
- Remember to only use your eyes to observe and do not disturb any homes or animals.
- If you do not see any birds at first, try sitting or standing still for 5 minutes.
- Draw a picture or write a sentence about what you found. Email us! Also email us if you have any questions you would like to ask us!



Birds with their feathers puffed up
(Photo by Mouser Williams)



Deer with their winter coats
(Photo by Mouser Williams)



Signs of animal burrows under the snow



Animal tracks in the snow



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