

# THE ICE STORM



Winter's weather can wreak havoc  
on wildlife.

by Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

One winter morning we awoke to a world covered with ice. Rain had frozen in quarter-inch thickness, glazing each twig, leaf and branch. Small trees and bushes hung their heads over pathways; branches from bigger trees had crashed to the ground.

The sun climbed over the treetops and made a thousand rainbows on the ice. Some trees shot forth golden sparks; others held winking rubies. Laurel leaves drooped in clusters—small green umbrellas, each stay tipped with crystal. Upside-down holly leaves sagged under heavy loads, and the berries, encased in ice, looked like miniature paperweights, red centers magnified by thick glass.

Most animals were in hiding. I was on my way to the birds' regular feeding place, wondering how birds in general would fare with their natural source

of food barred. Later came the news that dozens of mourning doves had been found frozen. Others, rescued and fed, did recover and were released.

As the wind began to rise, strained branches wrung themselves off and crashed with a great splintering. I watched a group of quail who crouched motionless when branches swayed and clattered above them.

The only tracks besides a few made by some deer were those of a red fox who had traveled in the opposite direction. Later I saw him trotting across an open field, pausing now and then to look back at me.

Just ahead, in the laurel and sweet pepper bushes along the path, a sudden commotion occurred. Up through a maze of interlocked twigs and branches struggled a big hawk. Frantic to get away, he let drop from his talons a frozen rabbit. The hawk flapped to the top of a sassafras snag, from which I suppose he descended to his meal once I had gone.

Pine needles were so heavily iced that eight-inch trunks snapped like matchsticks. Tough branches of oak, maple and hickory were wrenched and thrown to the ground as if by an angry giant.

While the ice stayed for several days, birds thronged to the yard in great numbers. A robin was among the visitors. He seemed to relish small seeds among the mixed feed. Several red-winged blackbirds, male and female, arrived. Evening grosbeaks, who had deserted sunflower seeds for the natural food of buds in the forest, now flocked to the feeder, since all of the buds were imprisoned by ice.

Heretofore the winter had been so mild that a one-winged Canada goose brought his mate daily to the cove. The goose habitually paused, letting his mate go first while he looked back over the pond, then joined her in dipping for corn.

A red squirrel mingled with several gray squirrels on the feeder. If the gray ones got too close, he chased them away. If he interfered with their feeding, they chased him. Most of the time they ate side-by-side, with the red one keeping up a muttering in his throat. Doves and quail devoured any seeds that fell to the ground.

The ice storm was followed by mild weather. Carolina wrens sang; tree toads resumed their birdlike calls; tufted titmice and chickadees gave forth spring-like notes.

Broken limbs were cut for firewood. Fallen popular branches were fed to the beavers (with some left where they fell for rabbits to gnaw). The ice storm was over. We were ready for spring. □ □

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