



MassWildlife News

Commonwealth of Massachusetts – Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
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SNOWY OWL IRRUPTION

An irruption of Snowy Owls is occurring in the eastern United States and Massachusetts is at the center of it all! An “irruption” occurs when birds in greater-than-usual numbers are observed in unusual locations. Most of the Snowy Owls in Massachusetts are in coastal areas, where the coastal dunes and large grasslands mimic tundra-like habitats the birds are accustomed to. Logan Airport has likely seen the highest density of these owls in eastern North America. As many as 15 owls have been seen at the airport at one time. Snowy Owls have turned up at a number of other sites in Massachusetts as well, including birds in Central Massachusetts and even a bird in downtown Springfield. “Snowy Owls are not uncommon in Massachusetts, especially along the coast,” says Andrew Vitz, DFW’s State Ornithologist. “What makes an irruption year unusual is the high number of birds and the unusual places they are spotted.” MassWildlife advises anyone who sees a Snowy Owl, to observe from a distance. In more urban areas, startled birds can easily be injured or killed after colliding with buildings.

The Snowy Owl is North America’s largest owl, standing nearly two feet tall and weighing approximately 4 pounds. This species is a circumpolar breeder of the far north including Alaska, Greenland, and Russia, where they breed on the ground in the open tundra. To blend in with its environment, the owl is white with a variable amount of dark barring on its chest, back, and head. These birds feed primarily on lemmings, and when food is abundant, adults may raise up to 12 young. Last summer, lemming numbers were very high and the owls likely had an extremely productive breeding season. Birds are probably moving south in large numbers because there simply are not sufficient food supplies on their breeding grounds to sustain their increased numbers all year. In fact, most of the birds arriving in the lower 48 this winter are heavily barred, suggesting they are birds that hatched last summer.

The irruption of Snowy Owls this year comes as somewhat of a surprise. Generally Snowy Owls undergo large scale southern movements about once in every four winters. However, a large irruption occurred in the winter of 2011-2012 and a smaller “echo” irruption in 2012-2013. A third consecutive irruption of

Snowy Owls raises many questions about the environmental conditions in the Arctic. However, at this point there are more questions than answers.

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PLAY IT SAFE ON THE ICE

Attention ice anglers, skaters, and other winter adventurers: check ice carefully before venturing out on ice-covered waters. In general, a clear layer of ice 4 inches thick is safe for foot traffic, but there are no guarantees. The following tips and resources will help you stay safe and enjoy the coming winter months.

Always consider ice to be potentially dangerous. Assess ice safety by using an ice chisel to chop a hole in the ice to determine its thickness and condition. Continue to test the ice as you go further out onto the pond or lake, since ice thickness is seldom uniform. The thickness of ice on ponds and lakes depends on water currents and/or springs, depth, and the presence of natural objects like tree stumps or rocks. Daily changes in temperature cause the ice to expand and contract, which affects its strength. Don't venture on to ice-bound rivers or streams because the currents make ice thickness unpredictable.

What if you fall through the ice? As with any emergency, don't panic! Briefly call for help. It doesn't take long for the cold water to start slowing your physical and mental functions, so you must act quickly. Air will remain trapped in your clothes for a short time, aiding in buoyancy. Kick your legs while grasping for firm ice. Try to pull your body up using ice pins or picks that should be hanging around your neck. Once your torso is on firm ice, roll towards thicker ice – the direction from which you previously walked. Rolling will distribute your weight better than walking. After you reach safe ice, you need to warm up quickly to prevent hypothermia. Go to the nearest fishing shanty, warm car, or house. Don't drive home in wet clothes.

If a companion falls through the ice remember the phrase "Reach-Throw-Go." If you are unable to reach your friend, throw a rope, jumper cables, tree branch, or other object. If this does not work, go for help; do not risk becoming a victim yourself. Pet owners should keep pets on a leash. If a pet falls through the ice, do not attempt to rescue the pet; go for help. Well-meaning pet owners can easily fall through the ice when trying to save their pets. Additional ice safety information is available on the [MassWildlife Website](#) and from the [Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency](#).

Ice Thickness and Strength

Ice Thickness (inches)	Permissible Load (on new* clear**, blue ice on lakes or ponds)
2" or less	STAY OFF!
4"	Ice fishing or other activities on foot
5"	Snowmobile or ATV
8"-12"	Car or small pickup truck
12" - 15"	Medium truck

*New ice is stronger than older ice. **White ice or "snow ice" is only about half as strong as new clear ice. Double the above thickness guidelines when traveling on white ice.

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OUTDOOR USERS: THANK A LANDOWNER TODAY

Private landowners are responsible for many of the hunting and fishing ventures carried out by members of the sporting community every year. Through their generosity, private landowners help make these and other wildlife-related experiences possible by granting access to their property. Access to fishing, hunting, hiking, or wildlife watching is a privilege and it's a great time of year to say thank you. You may also wish to thank land trusts or other private non-profit conservation land holders who have been host to your outdoor experiences. MassWildlife offers the following suggestions for thanking the private property owners:

- Be thoughtful and personal in expressing your appreciation. If you are mentoring a new or young hunter, angler, birder, or naturalist, include him or her in the process of thanking the landowner.
- Visit the landowner at the end of the season to express your appreciation in person; if possible, provide him or her with some of your fish and game harvest, share images, or a list of the wildlife you observed on their property.
- Send a personal note or card thanking the landowner for the opportunity to use their land. Consider giving a small gift such as a certificate to a local restaurant, a gift basket, or a subscription to [Massachusetts Wildlife magazine](#). In the case of a non-profit landowner, make a donation or join their organization.
- Offer to assist with tasks around the property, or identify, clean up, and properly dispose of any illegal dumping that has occurred.
- Assist the landowner in protecting the property by documenting and reporting suspicious or illegal activities to the Environmental Police at (800) 632-8075.

“Hunting, fishing, birding, and other wildlife-related activities are traditions that will continue only if everyone follows the basic principles of being a responsible outdoor recreationist,” says Marion Larson, MassWildlife Information and Education Chief. “Take a few moments to reflect on our outdoor traditions, including the importance of access to private lands in maintaining these traditions. What can you do in 2014 to ensure that these recreational opportunities will continue to be available to you and future generations of outdoor users?”

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2013 SEPTEMBER BEAR SEASON NUMBERS

One hundred forty-seven black bears were harvested during the 2013 September and November black bear seasons. Licensed hunters in western and central Massachusetts took 120 animals in the early season, and 27 in the late season. Successful hunters took advantage of the online harvest reporting system which was available for the first time during the 2013 season. Hunters checked 102 bears using the online system; 45 bears were checked in person at check stations. For more information on this year's harvest, and bear harvest totals from previous years, [visit our website](#).

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JANUARY 10 DEADLINE FOR FRESHWATER FISHING AWARDS PROGRAM

Freshwater Sportfishing Award participants are reminded that all affidavits must be submitted to MassWildlife and postmarked by January 10, 2014 to be eligible for the 2013 season. The Sportfishing Award, also known as the Sportsfishing Pin Award, is given every year to Massachusetts anglers who have caught exceptional freshwater fish from waterbodies that are open to the public. Anglers receive “bronze pins” for catching fish of certain [minimum weight requirements](#) for 22 species. “Gold pins” are awarded to anglers who catch the largest fish in each category. Gold pin winners, as well as the winner of the highly revered Angler of the Year, will be announced in the coming months. Did you miss out on the 2013 season? Learn more about MassWildlife’s Freshwater Sportfishing Award at our [website](#), view the [current weight leaders](#), purchase your fishing license at [MassFishHunt](#), then get ready to compete in 2014!

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WEBSITE TIP OF THE MONTH: THE SEAL GETS YOU HOME!



When navigating the [MassWildlife website](#), click on the seal to go to our homepage. The Division of Fisheries & Wildlife seal, present near the top right corner of most of our web pages, is a quick way to get to the MassWildlife homepage. Since the MassWildlife website is now housed within the Mass.gov site, this tip will also alert you if you unintentionally leave the MassWildlife site. Look for more website tips in the future.

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UPCOMING PUBLIC MEETINGS

January 9 – Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee Meeting, West Boylston

– The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee will be meeting on Thursday, January 9, 2014, at the DFW Field Headquarters Office located at 100 Hartwell Street, Suite 230, West Boylston from 1:30- 4:30 P.M. in Conference Room A. Call MassWildlife at (508) 389-6360 for more information. The meeting is handicapped accessible and open to the public.

January 21 – Fisheries and Wildlife Board Meeting, West Boylston

– The Fisheries and Wildlife Board will meet at 12:00 P.M. at the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Field Headquarters, 100 Hartwell Street, Suite 230, West Boylston. The meeting is open to the public and the building is handicapped accessible. Call (508) 389-6342 for more information.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- **January 8 - February 15 -- Junior Duck Stamp Art Exhibit, New Bedford** – A combination of the top 100 pieces of Junior Duck Stamp Artwork will be on display at the Buttonwood Park Zoo at 425 Hawthorn Street, New Bedford. Contact Gail Janeczek at (508) 991-6178 for more information on the [Buttonwood Park Zoo](#) exhibit. Learn more about the Junior Duck Stamp Art contest by visiting our

[website](#) or by contacting the JDS coordinator, Pam Landry at (508) 389-6310 or by email at Pam.Landry@state.ma.us.

- **January 11 – The Bobcat in Massachusetts, Harwich** – Sue Ingalls, DFW Wildlife Technician, will discuss bobcat biology, behavior, natural history, and management efforts at the Harwich Community Center, 100 Oak Street Harwich at 2:00 P.M. The talk is hosted by the [Harwich Conservation Trust](#) and open to the public. The Community Center is handicapped accessible.
- **January 15 – The Recovery of Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons in Massachusetts, Arlington** – Andrew Vitz, DFW State Ornithologist, will present to the [Menotomy Bird Club](#) at 7:30 P.M. at the Fox Library community room in Arlington. Fox Library is located at 175 Massachusetts Avenue on the corner of Cleveland Street. Take the side entrance on Cleveland Street; the community room is downstairs. The meeting is open to the public; however, the location is not handicapped accessible. Email Marj@mrines.com for more information.
- **January 14, 16, 28, & 30 – Basic Freshwater Fly Tying Course, Charlton** – This event, sponsored by the Town of Charlton and the MassWildlife Angler Education Program, will take place at the Charlton Senior Center (37 Main Street) from 7:00 – 9:00 P.M. This is a FREE four-session course (weather permitting) for beginning fly tyers only. Participation in all four classes is strongly encouraged. All tools and tying materials will be provided. The minimum age for participation is 12. Space for the class is limited, pre-registration is required. Contact Todd Girard at 508-248-2247, todd.girard@townofcharlton.net to pre-register.
- **January 25 – Frogs, Mussels, Crayfish, and Other Critters: Biodiversity of Lakes and Ponds in Massachusetts, Worcester** – DFW Aquatic Ecologist, Peter Hazelton, will speak at a meeting of the [Massachusetts Congress of Lake and Pond Associations](#) (COLAP) from 1:45-2:45 P.M. The COLAP meeting will take place at Worcester State University and is open to the public. For more information contact Carol Hildreth at hildrethcr4@gmail.com.
- **January 26 – The Black Bear in Massachusetts, Sterling** – DFW Wildlife Technician, Sue Ingalls, will cover black bear natural history, research efforts, management practices, and human/wildlife interactions. The talk will take place at 2:30 P.M. at the First Church Parish Hall on 6 Meetinghouse Hill Road in Sterling (it is a white church on the common just off Rte 12/Rte 62.) The event is free and open to the public and the building is handicapped accessible. Contact Marion Larson at the Sterling Land Trust at (978) 422-5162 or email marion46@verizon.net for more information.