

THE PARK PRESS

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History of Groundhog Day



Shubenacadie Sam

Staff Photo

Groundhog Day goes back to ancient celebrations in Europe, where the end of hibernation in bears was celebrated in late January. This festival marked the midpoint between Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox, and ended up coinciding with the Christian holiday of Candlemas, which falls 40 days after Christmas on February 2nd. On this day the clergy would bless and distribute candles. The weather on that day was believed to predict how much winter weather remained.

In England the saying was:

“If Candlemas be fair and bright,
Come, Winter, have another flight.”

The saying has many regional variations and eventually a second verse was added:

“If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,
Go Winter, and come not again.”

The badger and European hedgehog were often found stirring at this time of year and were brought into some of the festivities, soon being used to predict the arrival of spring in many areas of Europe. As the settlers arrived in North America they selected the groundhog to transfer this particular role to, even though groundhogs seldom wake from hibernation that early, especially in northern areas.

It was the German settlers in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania that really got Groundhog traditions going with festivities on Gobbler Knob being recorded since 1887. The original celebration actually involved eating the groundhog! Now groundhogs all over the US and Canada lead famous and lavish lives. The largest ceremony is still in Punxsutawney with tens of thousands of people celebrating all week; but our Shubenacadie Sam has been predicting since the late 80s and has the distinction of being the first groundhog to make the prediction every year. He also has his own 24hr webcam in the weeks leading up to the big day.

Follow Shubie Sam on
Twitter
[@ShubenacadieSam](https://twitter.com/ShubenacadieSam)



Featured Park Friend: Barn Owl



Barn Owl (male)

Staff Photo

Name: Barn Owl

Scientific Name: *Tyto alba*

Size: Height - 32-40cm (1-1.3feet)

Weight - 400-600g (14-21ounces)

Wingspan - 100-125cm (3.3-4feet)

Colour: speckled in a range of pale colours including white, tan, beige and grey. The darker colours are on their back and tops of the wings while their undersides are much lighter. They have a distinctive heart-shaped face.

Lifespan: about 5 years in the wild

Habitat: Prefer open areas like meadows, pastures, cities, wetlands and open forests, they avoid dense forests, mountains, and the arctic.

Range: Found worldwide, they range from extreme southern Canada down through the States into Central and Southern America.

Feeding: Carnivores, eating mostly small mammals like mice, rats, voles and shrews, but can also take rabbits and small birds.

Breeding: Typically mating for life, pairs form after the male displays in flight and offers a selection of nest sites. The female scrapes pellets into a modest nest in a tree, cave or building cavity then lays an average of 5-6 eggs. The male defends and feeds her during the approximately 30 incubation days. Chicks fledge after about 7 weeks and leave the nest about 6 weeks later.

Fun Facts: Their ability to hunt by sound is the best that has ever been studied. They are able to catch mice in complete darkness.

Females have more heavily speckled chests making them showier than the males, a rarity in the bird world.



Barn Owl (female)

Staff Photo

Upcoming Guest Speaker Saturdays

Saturday February 20 1:00-2:30pm

Wildlife Rehabilitation

Presented by Helene Van Doninck of the Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre

Join Helene Van Doninck, Wildlife Veterinarian and Co-Founder of the CWRC in Hilden, as she discusses some recent wildlife patients admitted to the Centre. She will also talk about the impact free-roaming cats have on wildlife and will offer some helpful solutions on how to keep both cats and wildlife safe.

Saturday March 19 1:00-2:30pm

Hiking with Lichens

Presented by Frances Anderson,
Author and Lichenologist

Lichens are slow growing, long living organisms, formed by the symbiotic association between algae and fungi. Lichens can be viewed in nature all year round. Join us for a talk and hike in the Wildlife Park's Wetland Trail with one of the authors of the new book "Common Lichens of Northeastern North America". Dress accordingly.

Pre-registration is required. You must receive a confirmation email to be eligible for these events. If inclement weather is anticipated, those registered will be contacted by 9am on the day of the event.

For more information, or to pre-register, please phone: 902-758-5316 or email legacycentre@novascotia.ca

Groundhog Day & World Wetlands Day!



Hon Zach Churchill urges Sam out

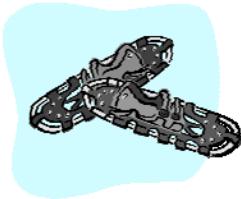
Staff Photo 2015

Celebrate with us Tuesday, February 2nd for double the fun. Festivities start at 7am with Shubenacadie Sam making his appearance and prediction at 8am. Will we have an early spring or more winter, only Sam knows for sure! Face painting and free hot beverages will be available. The animal enclosure area will be open free of charge from 8:15am to 12:00pm. Additionally in celebration of World Wetlands Day the Greenwing Legacy Centre will have lots of activities including crafts and games as we're joined by: Nova Scotia Clean Foundation, Dept of Environment, Dept of Agriculture, Dept of Natural Resources, Maritime Aboriginal Aquatic Resources Secretariate, Canadian Wildlife Federation and Ducks Unlimited to learn more about the importance of wetlands.



Upcoming Events

Snowshoeing at the Park



Have you ever wanted to try snowshoeing? We have the snowshoes if winter gives us the snow. This will be offered periodically on weekends starting January 9, 2016, from 10am-1pm (**Snowshoeing will not be offered February 20 & 21**). We wish to encourage people of all ages to try this easy and *free* recreational activity. To make arrangements or get more information: Phone 902-758-5316 or Email: legacycentre@novascotia.ca To check weather conditions at the Wildlife Park call 902-758-2040 after 9am on the weekends to ensure the facility is open.

March Break



Join us March 14-18 from 9:30am-12pm at the Wetland Centre for crafts and activities. There will be a different fun theme for each day. The animal enclosure area will also be open from 9am-3pm at regular winter rate. **Night Tours** - March 11 & 19 at 7:30pm \$6.00 cash per person (pre-registration is necessary)

Spring Celebration



Join us Saturday March 26 from 10am-1pm for our annual Animal Egg Hunt through the Park! Treats, hot chocolate and a craft will also be provided.

For more information call 902-758-5316 or email: legacycentre@novascotia.ca

Did you know?



◆ The average **Mouse** eats 15-20 times a day, producing 40-100 droppings per day.



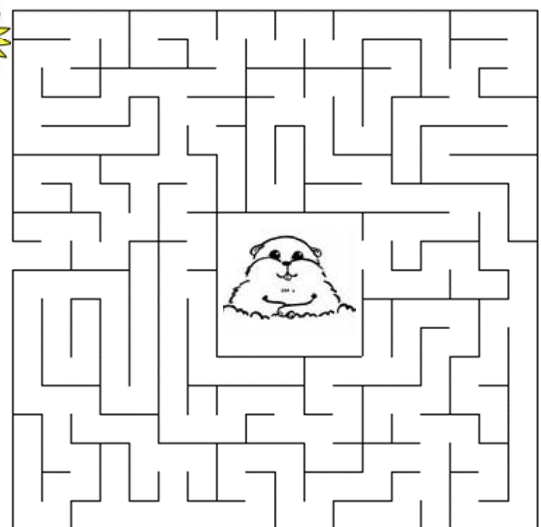
◆ In winter, **Downy Woodpecker** males forage on small branches leaving the less productive thick branches and trunks to the females.

◆ The most expensive spice in the world is Saffron and it is made from **Crocuses**. One ounce requires 80 thousand crocus plants.

◆ Ireland is not the only place with no **Snakes**; Iceland, Greenland, New Zealand, and Antarctica (among others) also all lack snakes.



Can you help Sam find his way out of his den? Will he predict Spring or Winter? You decide!



Q: What is a Groundhog's favourite book?
A: Holes!