

JANUARY 15- 31, 2022 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

PREDATOR/PREY



Red Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*, © pennyclick.co.uk.

Wildlife is dependent on food, but because they can't produce their own food, as humans do, they need to hunt and find their source. Easy for an herbivore, more difficult for a carnivore! Once the food supply is found the consumer will feed on that source until it either runs out or the effort becomes so tedious that they will look elsewhere for their sustenance.

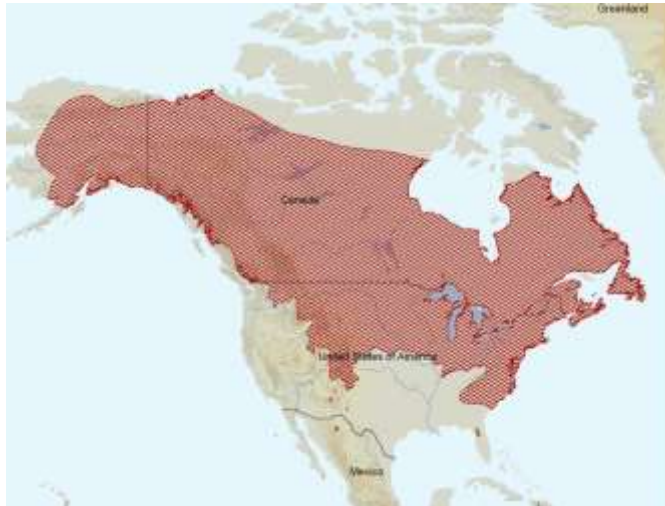
Important point here: "if the effort becomes so tedious." If an animal is spending more time and energy trying to find food than it is able to acquire to stay alive in a given area, that animal will begin to look elsewhere. This behavior is written into the DNA of all wildlife and therefore, they will move before they themselves are adversely affected.

Case in point: Meadow Vole, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*, population fluctuates every 4 years rather dramatically (Kurta 1995). During that time as the population increases, a weasel and other predators such as snakes, owls, gulls, foxes, coyotes, hawks, and others that feed on Meadow Voles will find them fairly easily and consume them as the Meadow Vole population increases. When the Meadow Vole population crashes as it will statistically by the calendar, predators will have to look elsewhere for food.

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Meadow Vole, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*,
© Doris-potter pixels.com



Meadow Vole, North American distribution.
© blogspot.com

However, looking at the distribution map one might think that any type of population crash would cover the whole map. Not so! The population increase is very localized and therefore its resulting population crash is also localized.

Even nomadic tribes move from season to season so that they will be less likely to run out of possible staples.

Even the American Buffalo, aka Bison moved from grassy plain to new grassy plain as they grazed large masses of the American prairies.

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Man sometimes gets wrapped up in his own way of life and tends to forget that wildlife have their own cycles that they have to adhere to, their own way of life that they are forced to observe, over which they basically have no control.

For example, note the movement of Caribou in Northern Canada and Alaska and the urge for the Caribou to move in large numbers with the seasons for food and protection. That movement is ingrained in their DNA!



Caribou, *Rangifer tarandus granti*,
© Ron Niebrugge, Denali-National-Park

SNOW BUNTING

How would one describe the snowbird, or by its common name a Snow Bunting?



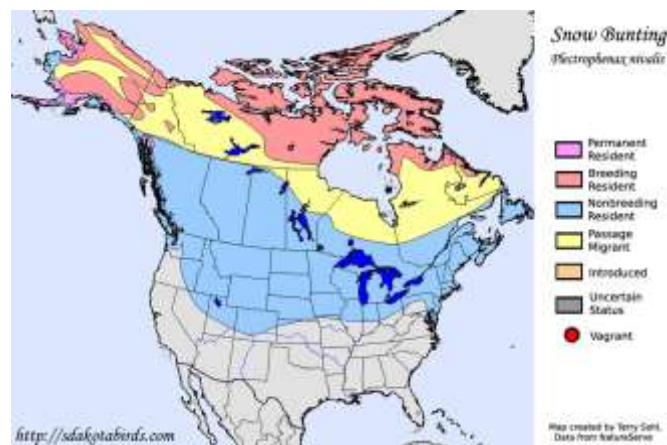
Snow Bunting, *Plectrophenax nivalis*,
© Daniel-Cadieux,pixels .com

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As one can see from the distribution map the Snow Bunting is an Arctic bird, visiting us only in the winter. During an arctic winter the environment is so severe that it would be very difficult for the Snow Bunting to find food and shelter. Therefore, one can see that the species moves below the tundra zone during the winter where its chances of finding food is greatly improved.

During the Spring and Summer, a breeding adult bird's head and body color is mostly white with black wing tips, black back and black at the end of its tail. In Fall and Winter dependent on the age of the bird, one will see a mixture of shades of browns on its head, back, along with black wing tips and black at the end of its tail.



Distribution Map of the Snow Bunting,
© <http://sdakotabirds.com>

Breeding adults seek the tundra and the rocky shores of wetlands and the coast. Probably this is why we see them on roadsides or in farm fields during the winter searching for plant seeds as well as gravel to help its gullet grind up the seeds for digestion.

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Fox tracks in snow

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit tracks in snow

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All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Average January Precipitation for Vermont = 2.05 inches.

Total precipitation for January was 18.4 mm or 0.72 inches. This is a 1.33-inch deficit for the month.

Overcast Days Jan 1-31: We had 19 days of overcast skies. Of those overcast skies 5 days produced precipitation. This month began with a new deficit.