

DECEMBER 1 – 14, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

WINTER

To many in the Northern Hemisphere, winter starts with the **winter solstice**, which is an astronomical phenomenon, where we experience the day with the shortest length of daylight and the longest night of the year. Winter solstice happens on December 21st. On the other hand, some would rather consider the whole month of December as the start of winter which, of course, includes the winter solstice. Dividing the year into quarters according to the seasons means that spring would start in the month of March and end the month of May.



Super Moon, December Full Moon taken early in the evening, (2100). © Dick Harlow

Although there are many times when March feels like we are still in winter, the salient point is that hours of daylight are getting longer, sap in trees are running on warm days bringing nutrients to the buds and cambium layers; certainly by the end of the month it feels that spring is right around the corner. We arbitrarily distinguish the four seasons as separated by where the sun is in relationship to the

earth and since we have divided the year into 12 months we now have an arbitrary gauge of three months per season. I think for some it is easier to look at the season beginning with the first of the month.



Super Moon, December Full Moon taken in the early morning (0615). © Dick Harlow

Notice the two pictures of the moon, one in the black of night and one early the next morning. The dark areas **on** the moon in the two pictures have changed from night to early morning. If that doesn't suggest we on earth and the moon are turning on our axis, I guess nothing will!

Whichever way you choose, the months of December, January and February are the winter months where, here in Vermont, we endure sub-zero temperatures, snow and ice. This is the time when wildlife, are in need of help. If we enjoy having wildlife to view from a distance or even being able to view them closer to our homes we need to fill our feeders periodically so that all the critters that live outside our abodes have a chance against the elements of nature. Every winter, at least to birders and feeder watchers alike, we all look forward to the

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possibility that northern Canadian finches and other northern birds might drift down during these tough months and become welcome visitors to our feeders.

In the winter of 2014-2015 here at EastView we had Pine Siskins and Redpolls visiting our feeders from January to April, a very welcome sight indeed. Add to this the occasional Eastern Bluebird and Robin that would sample a red Winterberry against the white snow was a welcome sight. Now if we could just entice an Evening or Pine Grosbeak, feeding on crabapples, we not only would be in great shape, but it would be a first for EastView!

COMMON REDPOLL



(1) Common Redpoll, *Acanthis flammea*, on Thistle Feeder. © Dick Harlow

These images were taken 28 January 2015 here at EastView. I had been accustomed to seeing these visitors from the far north at our feeders in Milton, VT periodically throughout the 10 years we lived there. When we moved to EastView I was hopeful, but no observations occurred until 2015. In 2015 you might understand my excitement when these fellows showed up at our Thistle feeders.

The Common Redpoll, *Acanthis flammea*, is in fact a common bird throughout most of Canada, Alaska and Greenland, excepting British Columbia where it is not a visitor.



(2) Common Redpoll, *Acanthis flammea*, one wanting a spot at the Thistle Feeder. © Dick Harlow

This is truly a northern finch. This species breeds in Northern Alaska, northern most Canada and along the east and west coast of Greenland. After the nesting season, it will

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move down to the Canadian provinces and along the Great Lakes and the border to the upper Mid-West and northern New England where it will feed on evergreen cone seeds and thistle seed in feeders. This is the only time we will be fortunate to see this species. For those that enjoy a challenge, there is another species/subspecies of Redpoll, called **Hoary Redpoll**, *Acanthis hornemanni*, see below (3). Although looking similar it is slightly larger in body, whiter or more of a frosty look, with minimal streaking and a shorter bill. The comparison of two birds on the same feeder can be seen at (4).



(4) **Hoary (Arctic) Redpoll**, *Acanthis hornemanni*, and **Common Redpoll**, *Acanthis flammea*, on a Thistle Feeder.

© dfaulder/Flickr/CC



(3) **Hoary (Arctic) Redpoll**, *Acanthis hornemanni*, on snow. © Brandon Holden

There is little research to speak of about whether there is any interbreeding between Common and Hoary so we don't know, even though both are found in the same area. If in fact *A. hornemanni* is considered a subspecies of *A. flammea*, then there is another one that is also considered as another possible subspecies and it is *A. exilipes*.

However, for now, excitement you might have would be if a finch with a red topknot and a look similar to the above images shows up at your feeder!

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

- White-tailed Deer – in back of Porter Hosp.
- Brown/Norway Rat - young male digging large burrows in garden; is a new mammal to EastView.
- Meadow Vole – scurrying in garden
- Coyotes – 2 Coyotes in the meadow between the Inn and Deer Meadow night of 12 December.
- Red Fox – spotted just past the entrance to EastView.

Weather Tidbits

Month of DECEMBER 1-14, 2017

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 23.4 mm or 0.9 inches

Overcast Days: 11