From trapping to skiing, Maine families are spending time together outdoors this winter.

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Last winter was my family’s first in Maine.

I expected it to be different – and by different, I mean harsher and more unrelenting – than the ones I’d experienced in New York and Connecticut, but nothing can quite prepare you for the sheer amount of snow that continues to pile up through the season, how grey everything looks after awhile or the days when it’s so cold, your face really, truly hurts.

Heck, for that matter, nothing could prepare me for how quickly we ended up acclimating to the changes.

In the end, we learned so much. How to stay warm when the temperatures plummet. The value of warming the car before driving. What layering your clothes really means. Meanwhile, my kids embraced the great Maine outdoors through skating, snowshoeing and playing outside often.

This season? I am hoping to hit the slopes with them. I started downhill skiing when I was age 5 or 6, and much like John Holyoke shares in his essay (page 27) in this issue, I fell in love with the speed and thrill of going down the mountain. I’m hoping that with some lessons my kids will love it too. Reporter Shelby Hartin shares some great money-saving resources in her story on page 20 for families looking to try skiing.

I expect that we’ll also love sampling the new breed of slope-side dining cropping up around Maine, which reporter Kathleen Pierce explores in her story on page 23.

And perhaps this season, we’ll make it to the Camden Snow Bowl for the World Toboggan Championships. Of course, we aren’t quite ready for the wintery excitement of snowshoeing and camping at Baxter State Park that Aislinn Sarnacki explores in her story on page 10. But maybe next year.

How about you? What adventures are you planning for this Maine winter? I hope this issue of the BDN’s Outdoors Magazine inspires you to get out there and explore.

SARAH WALKER CARON
EDITOR, BDN OUTDOORS
Junior trapper, Micah Shamlian, 11, enjoys the great outdoors and learning how to trap muskrats and beavers. Photo by Linda Coan O’Kresik | BDN
CATCHING Family Time

BY JOHN HOLYOEKE, OUTDOORS STAFF WRITER

Trapping’s hard work, but pays dividends for young outdoors enthusiasts.

Nowadays, Matt Dunlap has a pretty important job in state politics: He’s Maine’s Secretary of State, after all.

But when he was a kid growing up in Town Hill on Mount Desert Island, he had a bit of a reputation ... one that his father was more than happy to tell anyone who’d listen.

“I was not an energetic kid. My father would explain to people that I was the only person that he’d ever seen with no shame,” Dunlap said.

“He said] that I was the laziest person in the world, and that I would do nothing for days.”

Then, about the time he turned 9 years old, something changed: Dunlap, who had gravitated to the adventure stories of Kit Carson during weekly trips to the Somesville Public Library, got the chance to live out some adventures of his own.

Mentored by an older man, he took up trapping.

“When I took up trapping, [my father] was absolutely astounded that I was so committed to it, and would do everything by the numbers, every single day,” Dunlap said. “He was amazed at the transformation of responsibility that came over me.”

Not many Maine youths are active trappers. According to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, in 2013 just 236 of the 3,141 licensed trappers were younger than 16.

But Dunlap said the lessons he learned over a six- or seven-year span were immensely valuable. In fact, he says taking up trapping changed his life.

“It set a course for me that I really didn’t see at the time,” he said.
Dunlap hasn’t trapped for years – real life got in the way, and the activity is very time-consuming – and admits that an odd convergence of circumstances led to him being allowed to trap in the beginning.

“There was a fella in the area whose name was Skip Leach,” he said. “He was a bit of a legend in trapping circles, which I didn’t realize. And he would talk to my father and was always looking for places to run a trapline.”

Dunlap’s dad wasn’t interested, explaining that with young children and pets running around the family farm – one of those pets a victim of an irresponsible trapper’s trap years earlier – he wasn’t interested.

But his young son was interested. And then the chickens got involved.

“My mother spent a lot of money on Hubbard’s golden comets,” Dunlap explained. “They’re beautiful, big, fat, slow, egg-laying hens. They can produce like a half-dozen eggs a day. But they’re also very tasty, and foxes and raccoons really like ’em. So we were losing a boatload of chickens to predators.”

The solution: Allow young Matt to learn the trapping trade from Leach, in hopes of providing a safer environment for the hens.

“It was just the greatest learning experience in the world,” Dunlap said. “I learned more about the outdoors in those six, seven years that I trapped than I probably ever have at any other time since.”

Among Leach’s most valuable lessons, according to Dunlap: Ethics.

“He would take me to other guys’ traplines that he knew were breaking the law and he would say, ‘This is what gets us in trouble. Don’t ever do this. This is how trapping gets banned in other states.’

And while he never got rich, Dunlap did find a bit of financial security in trapping, especially for a young boy.

“It was my Christmas money,” he said.

Up in Presque Isle, Corey Graham took up trapping because of his son’s interest in the activity. Graham’s son, Ben, is now 13. And after learning to trap from his grandfather, retired game warden Charlie Merrill, Ben decided that he and his dad ought to trap together.
“Two summers ago, he and I took our trapping [education] course together, and got our trapping licenses,” Corey Graham said.

Ben is also an avid hunter and fisherman, and has shown that he’s willing to endure the harsh conditions that trapping requires.

“He loves the outdoors. [One day] it was pouring rain outdoors and he still wanted to go trapping,” Corey Graham said. “That’s one thing that’s going to draw him to an activity: Being outdoors and wading around in some bog.”

Corey Graham said he tries to teach Ben something new every time they go out, but the simple act of spending time together is beneficial.

“He’s got a sister who has been a very successful basketball player, and that was kind of her thing. I’d take her to tournaments and AAU,” he said. “This is kind of our thing that we do together: We hunt and fish and trap together. It’s just a good family time.”

Corey Graham said his son earned a bit of money last winter, but quickly learned that his ultimate goal – buying a high-priced bird dog with his earnings – wasn’t within reach. Ben is currently coveting a nice shotgun that he saw in L.L. Bean, but time will tell if he earns enough to purchase it.

“He had grandiose ideas on how much money he was going to make,” his father said with a chuckle.

Over in Newburgh, Kevin Smith has been trapping with his stepson, Micah Shamlian, for a few years now. Early in 2015, Shamlian said simply spending quality time with Smith was a big reason he enjoyed trapping.

“[I] get to get out and just have time [with him] and get out in the woods,” the 11-year-old said. “It’s really nice.”

Smith uses that time outdoors to teach Shamlian lessons, and rarely do they come back without having learned something.

Among those lessons: Muskrat doesn’t taste good.

“We only tried it once,” he said, explaining that his mother didn’t want the family to waste what might be perfectly good meat.

But it wasn’t that good.

It’s called “heater hunting.” That’s when a hunter drives a back road in search of game with the car heater blasting. Some game animals can be spotted this way, particularly ruffed grouse. It means a nice drive in the woods and food on the table, without the inconvenience of frostbite.

I practice a variation I call “heater birding.” I drive dirt roads, often the same roads the hunters are using. We wave to each other. Winter is a spectacular time to bird, and much of it can be done with the car heater turned all the way up to incinerate.

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I practice a variation I call “heater birding.” I drive dirt roads, often the same roads the hunters are using. We wave to each other. Winter is a spectacular time to bird, and much of it can be done with the car heater turned all the way up to incinerate.

Just like a hunter, I may have to step out of the car when something good comes along. But unlike a hunter, I can enjoy most of my wildlife interactions with the windows up. This kind of birding is especially easy to do in Maine, and I often wonder why people don’t do it more often. I suggest three areas to explore.

‘Heater birding’ can pay off during cold months.

BY BOB DUCHESNE
can find blowing seeds a little easier on plowed surfaces. I love the blueberry barrens in Columbia. Many birds are attracted to manure on agricultural fields in winter. Not everything that goes through a cow gets digested. A lot of perfectly edible grain comes out the back end. It’s customary to see big flocks of crows picking through recently-spread manure, and a closer look may reveal those same buntings, larks, and longspurs enjoying the feast.

FOREST

The Maine forest offers the third great habitat for heater birding. Finches have a tendency to roam in big flocks. Watch for a cloud of birds alighting in the treetops. Better yet, all finches tend to land in the road in winter, especially in the morning. Not only are they interested in finding food on plowed surfaces, but they also pick up grit to aid digestion. Red and white-winged crossbills, pine grosbeaks, and the smaller finches such as American goldfinches, common redpolls, and pine siskins are often seen on gravel logging roads. Wherever two plowed roads intersect, truck traffic churns up the snow, creating a good feeding area. Finches cluster in these spots. The din can be deafening when hundreds gather.

There is only one good period for birding in Maine each year, but it lasts 365 days. I pity the poor flatlanders who think it’s too cold up here to have fun in winter. They’ll never know what they’re missing.

OCEAN

First, the ocean. There are many locations where birders can drive along the shoreline, watching for wintering waterfowl that congregate in sheltered coves. Acadia National Park is a splendid example. Part of the loop road on Mount Desert Island is open in winter, and many of the island’s harbors and coves can be investigated through the windshield. Even on a frigid day, one can spot unusual species from the warmth of the car, getting out just long enough for a better view.

The Schoodic portion of Acadia National Park is even easier. The park road runs close to the water, and there are long stretches of ocean visibility. Schoodic Point provides a vista, and there’s no need to get out of the car unless there’s something unusual in the distance.

In southern Maine, you can scan the waters next to The Nubble Lighthouse in York, Perkins Cove in Ogunquit, and Wells Harbor, and never leave the car. There is lots of ocean viewing to be had at Biddeford Pool, even at 20 below zero. Pine Point in Scarborough is terrific in winter. Portland’s Back Cove and Eastern Promenade also put winter waterfowl on display.

On the Down East end of the coast, there are good opportunities for heater birding in Jonesport, Roque Bluffs, Machias, and parts of the Bold Coast around Cutler. Farther north, Lubec and Eastport are packed with ocean viewing spots.

FIELDS

Fields offer the second good opportunity for heater birding. Unless the grasses are completely covered by snow, subarctic breeders from Canada wander south and feed on the seeds blowing across the snow surface. Snow buntings, horned larks, and Lapland longspurs can gather in big flocks, and they swirl around hay fields and blueberry barrens. Often, they settle on the road in front of you, as they can find blowing seeds a little easier on plowed surfaces. I love the blueberry barrens in Columbia.

Many birds are attracted to manure on agricultural fields in winter. Not everything that goes through a cow gets digested. A lot of perfectly edible grain comes out the back end. It’s customary to see big flocks of crows picking through recently-spread manure, and a closer look may reveal those same buntings, larks, and longspurs enjoying the feast.
BY AISLINN SARNACKI, OUTDOORS STAFF WRITER
Colored in snow and ice, Katahdin lords over the quiet woods of Baxter State Park. It is Maine’s tallest mountain, which makes it a top destination for hikers each summer, but in the winter, it’s a different challenge altogether.

Few people brave Katahdin’s snowy slopes to reach Baxter Peak. In fact, few people even come close.

“You get the highest winds, the deepest snows and the lowest temperatures,” said Stewart Guay, Deputy Chief Ranger of Baxter State Park.

For seven years, Guay was stationed as a winter ranger at Chimney Pond, a pristine tarn located in the arms of Katahdin at 2,219 feet above sea level. From that backcountry campground, hikers can climb the mountain on three different trails.

“That winter job at Chimney was the best job I ever had,” Guay said. “The weather extremes, interacting with those winter climbers and campers, getting out into the environment and doing some ice climbing and stuff myself... The winter, as dangerous and rugged as it is, brings such tremendous beauty.”

Baxter State Park, 200,000 acres of wilderness, is navigable by gravel park roads in the summer, but in the winter the park roads are closed to vehicles. The snow builds up, and park visitation plummets. Everything changes.

In the park’s most recently released annual report, winter camping reservations accounted for about 6 percent of the park’s camping reservations that year, while the summer camping season accounted for 94 percent of the reservations. The summer season stretches from May through October, and during that time, the park counted 50,627 “camper nights,” which equals one person camping for one night. In contrast, during the park’s winter camping season, December through March, the park counted 3,380 camper nights.
“Our numbers in the winter are tremendously less than in the summertime,” Guay said. “We attribute it to the remoteness and the survival factor of camping in the Maine winter, in the mountains and remote locations.”

Winter at Chimney Pond
On the frozen shore of Chimney Pond, the snowy walls of Katahdin rear up on three sides – north, west and south. The east is open to the rising sun.

A ranger’s cabin, bunkhouse and lean-tos are tucked into the evergreen forest nearby. And scattered here and there, half-buried in snow, there may be tents.

“We don’t allow tenting [at Chimney Pond] in the summertime,” Guay said. “But in the winter we do.”

Because of the heavy snow-cover, tenting doesn’t cause erosion and kill plants during the winter as it would in the summer. And it’s a great option for winter campers, Guay said, because it’s cheaper than renting the 10-person bunkhouse and tents are usually much warmer than the lean-tos. Snow is a great insulator, and it’s not unusual for Chimney Pond Campground to have a 7-foot base depth of snow.

When it comes to winter camping, the cold is always a chief concern. When winter camping, you inevitably have downtime, and when you’re immobile, it’s easy to get cold, Guay said. So one tactic is to “putter around,” find something physical to do.

A lean-to at the Abol Campground during a winter trip to climb Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park in March 2011. Photographer GABOR DEGRE | BDN

When it comes to winter camping, the cold is always a chief concern. When winter camping, you inevitably have downtime, and when you’re immobile, it’s easy to get cold, Guay said. So one tactic is to “putter around,” find something physical to do.

The experience isn’t for everyone.
After all, campers have to ski and snowshoe about 13 miles just to reach Chimney Pond Campground.

“So folks will make snow structures, often around the lean-tos,” Guay said. “By the end of winter, you end up with a lean-to encapsulated with snow blocks. Then you get the best of both worlds – the temperature won’t be much colder than 25 or 30 degrees Fahrenheit inside ... and the cool thing about having a lean-to inside of a snow structure is that it’s not going to drip on you. It has a roof.”

Unlike other campgrounds in Baxter State Park, campfires are prohibited at Chimney Pond. But Guay said that many winter campers forgo campfires anyway. It’s too easy for sparks to burn holes in expensive Gore-Tex equipment.

The experience isn’t for everyone, Guay said. After all, campers have to ski and snowshoe about 13 miles just to reach Chimney Pond Campground. And from there, many of them are aiming to climb to the peaks of Katahdin.

“The campers and climbers know that up above treeline, it’s not like it is in the summertime,” Guay said. “If someone gets hurt and calls 911 or has a personal locator beacon and pushes the panic button, we won’t get to them right away. Rescue in the winter is slow and uncertain.”

While all the snow makes climbing up to rescue someone a slow process, it makes getting down off a mountain a lot easier than it is in the summer. For example, people who sprain or break legs while snowshoeing up a mountain can often slide down on their backsides – something that wouldn’t be an option without snow. And that’s exactly what happens, Guay said.

“Nine times out of 10, people will crawl, drag, slither and wallow to get themselves to a place where they can call for help and we can get them out,” Guay said. “I’ve seen some pretty creative self-rescue techniques.”

On average, there are one or two instances a winter in which injured climbers or skiers are unable to get back to a ranger cabin, Guay said, and rescue teams have to gather to retrieve them off a mountain.

“It’s really the highest stakes you’re going to get in the Maine woods – a winter camping trip in Baxter State Park,” Guay said.

A guide to the park
Operating out of western Maine, Maine registered guides Melissa Shea and Jim Albert are known for leading clients on winter adventures in Baxter State Park, the Bigelow Mountain Range, Grafton Notch State Park and other mountainous regions throughout Maine.

When it comes to climbing Katahdin in the winter, Shea warns clients that the mountain is a lot more challenging in the winter. The trips usually last four or five days, and everything depends on the weather.

“Physically it can be, I’d say, at least 10 times harder [than in the summer],” said Shea, “because when the snow conditions have come in and you’re breaking trail, pulling 40 pounds on your sled and ski- ing through thigh-deep snow, by the time you get to Roaring Brook [campground], you’re going to be tired.”
From Roaring Brook, you have to hike 3.3 miles up Chimney Pond Trail on snowshoes. And from the pond, the real climb begins. While it’s only about 2 miles to the mountain’s summit, depending on which trail you choose to take, much of this last leg of the journey is above tree-line, exposed to the elements. And on the mountain, the weather is constantly in flux.

“We had a group of six last winter and it got very hairy,” Shea said. “The weather was awful, with very high winds – whiteout conditions. We were ready to turn around, and they wanted to keep going. Then, when they all got blown off their feet, we said, that’s enough.”

“It’s hard to say to somebody that they can’t make it to the top,” Shea said, “but you have to look out for their safety.”

“There’s a certain risk factor every winter voyager, mountaineer, or camper is trying to mitigate,” Guay said. “Sometimes the odds just aren’t in your favor.”

Both Shea and Albert are certified through the Maine Association of Search and Rescue and are Wilderness First Responders, trained in wilderness medicine. They’re constantly on the lookout for signs of hypothermia, dehydration and frostbite – all common problems while hiking in the Maine winter.

In addition to winter outdoor skills, the two guides have an arsenal of handy winter equipment, such as avalanche transceivers, compact shovels and bamboo wands that can be used to mark a route above treeline.

“We bring a lot of extra gear,” Shea said. “We like to have all of the safety equipment that’s possible ... and we bring in the best food, too. We carry in 10-pound lasagnas. We just go for it.”

But not all winter adventures in Baxter State Park are as challenging as an expedition to Chimney Pond. In fact, there are plenty of day trips you can take into the park, as well as campgrounds at lower elevations featuring warm cabins and campfires.
Diving into a snowy Baxter

There are two primary access points to Baxter in the winter:
• A winter parking lot is located off the Golden Road near Abol Bridge, near the southwest border of the park. From there, people ski and snowshoe into the park on trails.
• A smaller winter parking area is located shortly after Grand Lake Road crosses the East Branch of the Penobscot River at Matagamon Wilderness Campground near the north end of the park. The winter parking area is near where the road turns from pavement to gravel. Plowing stops at this point as well. From there, people can ski or snowshoe into the park on the unplowed road. This is the less used of the two winter access points.

Often people will attempt to drive into the park on the unplowed roads, especially when there has been little snowfall or the snow cover is packed, Guay said. But this isn’t allowed. Only snowmobiles are allowed on the park’s tote roads.

While the park is a very different place in the winter than it is in the summer, many of the park policies remain the same. Including the fact that people need to make reservations to camp.

On the winter reservation form, you have you include details about your intended route and itinerary while in the park. And there are a lot of places you can go.

“Almost anywhere there’s an outhouse, we’ll let you camp,” Guay said. “There are actually more places you can camp during the winter because the deep snow cover mitigates any impact on the ground.”

Aside from Katahdin, some popular mountains to climb in Baxter State Park during the winter are North Brother Mountain, South Brother Mountain, Mount Coe and the Traveler Mountain Loop.

If you’re just heading into the park for the day, it’s still important to plan ahead. And if you intend to hike above treeline or off marked trails in a single day, you’re subject to the same registration process as winter campers.

“It’s absolutely critical that folks know what they’re getting into, that they’re mentally and physically prepared and have prior experience with that activity and the equipment they bring,” Guay said. “We’ve had trips that didn’t go so well for folks that picked up what they needed at a sporting good store on the way to their trip. There’s a lot to sort out and stay on top of during winter camping.”

To learn more about planning a winter adventure in Baxter State Park, visit baxterstateparkauthority.com.

Registered Maine Guide Melissa Shea works with fellow guide Jim Albert to guide people on winter outdoor adventures throughout Maine, including snowshoe hikes, cross-country ski trips and ice climbing expeditions.

Photo Courtesy of MELISSA SHEA

Crisp sunshine and great trail conditions in 2012 as a group skis over the ice of Lower South Branch Pond in Baxter State Park. Pictured from left to right: Glen Widmer, Stan Farrell and A. Roy Curtis.

Photographer GABOR DEGRE | BDN
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COYOTES
Maine’s ‘Keystone Carnivore’

BY AISLINN SARNACKI, OUTDOORS STAFF WRITER
On a cold winter’s night, moonlight sparkles off the snow. Stars wink overhead. And in the forest, under a canopy of snow-covered pines, all the world seems asleep.

Then comes a lone haunting howl. It echos off the trees, sounding both mournful and joyful at once. The call of the Eastern coyote.

This wild canine has lived in Maine for thousands of years, singing its mysterious song.

“They howl for different reasons,” said Geri Vistein, a biologist from Brunswick who specializes in carnivore conservation. “Bonding is a big piece of it. They have close social bonds.”

Coyotes also use a variety of calls to communicate while hunting, announce their location, and mark territories, Vistein said. “They’ve evolved amazing intersocial behaviors,” she said. “We’ve only see the tip of it because they’re very reclusive. Very few biologists have actually sat and watched them for an extended period of time.”

Vistein holds a bachelor’s degree in wildlife biology from the University of Montana, where she studied grizzly bears and wolves, as well as two master’s degrees – one in education and one in natural resources – from the University of Vermont. There, she focused her research on wildlife conservation.

Taking a special interest in the Eastern coyote, Vistein has given numerous presentations about the animal at libraries, schools and farms throughout the state. And four years ago, she developed the educational website CoyoteLivesinMaine.com, which includes general information about coyotes, as well as resources to help people co-exist with them.

“They’re playing the role of the keystone carnivore here in Maine,” she said.

Coyotes expanded its range north and east into Maine in the 1930s, according to DIF&W, filling the niche that wolves once occupied as the largest canine predator.

Since then, coyotes have developed a poor reputation because of
their tendency to prey on one of the state’s chief game species – the white-tailed deer – as well as livestock. Yet Vistein says predators like the coyote are critical for keeping ecosystems healthy.

“The coyote’s role in keeping the rodent population down is huge,” Vistein said. “We need the predator to keep the balance. Whatever a coyote kills to survive, whether it’s a mouse or deer, helps that species stay healthy.”

While coyotes are known as a fierce carnivore, they actually have a very diverse, adaptable diet that includes berries and nuts, birds and fish, rabbits and deer, squirrels and insects, frogs and mice. Being opportunistic feeders help these wild canines survive in a variety of habitats and conditions – including the harsh Maine winter.

When snow depth restricts the movements of deer in Maine, these animals usually become a larger part of the coyote’s diet, according to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. Pairs of coyotes or family groups often hunt down small, weak or sick deer to survive these harsh months.

Winter is also the coyote mating season. From late January through February, the alpha pair of a family group will breed, and about two months later, they’ll give birth to a litter. The others in the family group often help the alphas raise these pups.

“They’re a remarkable species. They’re very intelligent, with a very complex language.”

— GERI VISTEIN

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“Coyotes have very complex social structures,” said Vistein. “Biologists no longer call them packs. They are families; a mother and father are the alphas, then their children, and sometimes, they let others in ... The family is very dynamic.”

This family dynamic, as well as the coyote’s struggle for survival in a world populated by people, is illustrated in Vistein’s first book, “I Am Coyote,” released by Tilbury House Publishers in October. For ages 10 and up, the story is written from the perspective of a coyote dispersing from its family group in Canada and traveling 500 miles to find a new territory and mate.

“They’re a remarkable species,” Vistein said. “They’re very intelligent, with a very complex language.”

This language – a song of howls, yips and undulating cries – may never be understood by humans, but it still speaks to us in a way. It says something wild and ancient. On a cold winter night, the haunting howl of the coyote echoes through the frozen forest, a song of survival.

“Coyotes have very complex social structures,” said Vistein. “Biologists no longer call them packs. They are families; a mother and father are the alphas, then their children, and sometimes, they let others in ... The family is very dynamic.”

This family dynamic, as well as the coyote’s struggle for survival in a world populated by people, is illustrated in Vistein’s first book, “I Am Coyote,” released by Tilbury House Publishers in October. For ages 10 and up, the story is written from the perspective of a coyote dispersing from its family group in Canada and traveling 500 miles to find a new territory and mate.

“They’re a remarkable species,” Vistein said. “They’re very intelligent, with a very complex language.”

This language – a song of howls, yips and undulating cries – may never be understood by humans, but it still speaks to us in a way. It says something wild and ancient. On a cold winter night, the haunting howl of the coyote echoes through the frozen forest, a song of survival.
INTRIGUING FACTS ABOUT THE EASTERN COYOTE:

- The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife estimates that about 12,000 coyotes currently live in Maine.
- The Eastern coyote breeds just once a year, during a short window of time in the winter, then gives birth in April or May.
- Coyote litters typically range from 3-8 pups, but larger litters – for instance, 15 pups – have been witnessed. Often the size of the litter depends on food availability and population density.
- Coyotes in captivity may live as long as 18 years. In the wild, few coyotes live more than four years; and the majority of pups die during their first year.
- An average adult coyote in Maine weighs 30 to 35 pounds, with males larger than females, and their coats can vary in color from black to strawberry blond.
- Coyotes mark the boundaries of their territory with urine on a regular basis to let other coyotes know to stay out.
- Attacks by coyotes on humans are rare. In Maine, a coyote attack has never been documented.
- Most hunting activity takes place at night, though hungry coyotes may hunt during daylight and will sometimes follow farm machinery to catch voles and mice as they’re disturbed.

Source: Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Maine winters are often hard to bear. The cold, ice and darkness are difficult to manage, but embracing the season often makes it more bearable—and even enjoyable.

Maine’s snowy season offers residents a number of opportunities to get outdoors. From snowshoeing and ice fishing to snowmobiling and ice hockey, options abound.

The difficulty that lies in participating in these activities isn’t a lack of opportunity; rather, it’s a lack of funds. Lift tickets for downhill skiing can average between $30 and $70 per person and sometimes more, and when multiplied by a family of four, the cost for a day of fun becomes a burden that’s sometimes unreasonable to bear.

But what if it wasn’t?

For families in Maine who want to get out and experience the outdoors during the winter, there are opportunities available that you might not know about yet.

One such opportunity is from WinterKids, a nonprofit whose mission is to “help children develop healthy lifelong habits through education and fun, outdoor winter activity,” according to marketing and communications manager Rob Wilber.

“In 2000, WinterKids became its own nonprofit and since then we’ve really expanded and morphed into an overall children’s health and education association,” Wilber said.

WinterKids offers children from preschool to 7th grade options to get involved outdoors—often for little to no cost. WinterKids has two primary opportunities. The first is for Maine’s youngest children, those from preschool to 4th grade. The FunPass offers this group the opportunity to try a number of winter activities, from cross country skiing to snowshoeing.

The free FunPass offers children three free visits to 19 areas in Maine, including the Caribou Ski Club in Caribou, the Black Mountain of Maine Touring Center in Rumford, Spruce Mountain in Jay, the New England Outdoor Center in Millinocket and The Birches in Rockwood, to name a few.

For Maine’s 5th, 6th and 7th graders, the $25 WinterKids Passport offers free and discounted tickets, lessons and rentals at 50 different areas in Maine. Downhill skiing is only one of many activities available, but for those who want to get started it’s an opportunity to try out the activity for a greatly reduced price.
Baker Mountain in Moscow, Camden Snow Bowl in Camden, Lonesome Pine Trails in Fort Kent, Mt. Abram in Greenwood and Titcomb Mountain in West Farmington each offer a free lift ticket with the purchase of an all-day adult lift ticket for children with a Passport. Taking children skiing then becomes an activity for the parent as well. Many areas also offer free or discounted equipment rentals for those who haven’t invested in the gear to hit the slopes.

The goal of WinterKids rests upon a few facts surrounding children in the United States.

“Childhood obesity has doubled over the past 30 years for preschoolers and adolescents and tripled for children ages 6 to 11 ... We want kids to be healthy and active year round, but with winter being our longest and most sedentary season, that’s where our focus is,” Wilber said.

Throughout all of WinterKids programs, including community and school programs, the organization reached over 20,000 children last year, and for a $25 Passport booklet, a total savings of $1,800 can be had by those who fully use everything it offers.

“We want to instill a love for winter at an early age so children will develop lifelong healthy habits,” Wilber said.

The WinterKids Passport offers special perks like WinterKids Family Days. Last ski season, passport holders were able to take advantage of deals at Lost Valley in Auburn, Camden Snow Bowl in Camden, Mt. Abram in Greenwood and Shawnee Peak in Bridgton. Tickets for passport holders were free, and prices for siblings and parents ranged from $15 to $20 for the day. Many of the areas also offered discounted lessons and rentals.

For more information about WinterKids, visit their website at winterkids.org.

“We want to instill a love for winter at an early age so children will develop lifelong healthy habits.”

— ROB WILBER, WINTERKIDS

Young skiers hit the slopes. WinterKids encourages Maine children to get outside in the cold and enjoy all the state has to offer by offering discounts at many ski facilities.

Photo courtesy of JACK MICHAUD
There are plenty of spots to ski in Maine.
Here are just a few that offer deals to get families out on the slopes:

Sunday River / Newry
At Sunday River beginner lift tickets for the South Ridge Express chairlift and Sundance Surface Lift are available for $39 for adults and teens and $29 for juniors and seniors. These lift tickets offer access to 17 trails, according to Sarah Devlin, communications director at Sunday River. Also available is free access every day for anyone to the Sundance Surface Lift and their learning area on the Sundance trail.

Sunday River also offers adult lessons for $39. “If someone wants to learn with their kids, it’s a great option,” Devlin said.

Black Mountain / Rumford
At Black Mountain children 5 and under ski for free and a lift ticket for those aged 6 to 74 is $29 on Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and vacation weeks and $15 on Fridays. In addition, the mountain offers a free opportunity to get young children involved in the outdoors.

“We offer free season passes for kids in kindergarten through 2nd grade ... We started it to encourage families to ski here and keep up the tradition of skiing in Rumford,” Cindy Decker, ticket office manager at Black Mountain said.

Shawnee Peak / Bridgton
“We’re a family mountain – a place for people to learn and have fun,” Katie Senger, events and ticket manager at Shawnee Peak said.

At Shawnee Peak, children 5 and under ski free on their surface lift with a paying adult. For more options, kids 5 and under ski for $10 with a paying adult for access to all lifts.

To top it off, on Mondays, the area offers Carload Days: Get to the slopes before 11 a.m. and everyone in the car skis or rides until 9 p.m. for $92. Monday Madness also takes place from 3:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. and lift tickets are only $13.

Camden Snow Bowl / Camden
At Camden Snow Bowl a lift ticket for the Slipway, their beginner lift, is only $10 for adults and students and $5 for children 5 and under.

“We offer kids really great deals, including free tickets if they’re with a paying adult,” Beth Ward, assistant director at Camden Snow Bowl said.

The area also offers a beginner package, which includes a lift ticket, lesson and rentals for $80.

Big Squaw Mountain / Greenville
At Big Squaw Mountain ticket prices are always reasonable. Adults can buy a lift ticket for $25, students in K-12 can ski for $20 and preschool aged children get a ticket for free.

Their lesson package deals include equipment, a lift ticket and a lesson for $48 for those aged 5 and up and lessons last for about one hour.

“We have group ski lessons including a six-week class that starts on Sundays – it can be as little as $10 for a lesson,” Amy Lane, president of The Friends of Squaw Mountain said.

“We believe strongly that kids in Maine need to learn about and appreciate the outdoors. They need to learn to swim, how to paddle a canoe and how to ski ... It’s a lifelong sport that you’ll never outgrow.”

By Shelby Hartin, BDN Features Writer

There are plenty of spots to ski in Maine. Here are just a few that offer deals to get families out on the slopes:
Things are getting sweeter at Sugarloaf Mountain this year. And cheesier and heartier.

A new fleet of food trucks spawned from Orono’s The Family Dog are heading north for the ski season. And they are in good company as mountain fare at Maine slopes continues to reinvent itself.

“I’ve been skiing for years. The food is constantly improving,” said Bob Cutler, who launched Grammy’s Grilled Cheeses and Melts and The Stray Dog mobile eateries last summer in Bangor. On the success of The Family Dog, which he also owns, the trucks will keep skiers sated this winter.

Buffalo mac and cheese with chicken and bacon on an artisan roll and a classic Chicago dog are the newest nosh for Sugarloafers. “People are used to better food and they demand better food,” said Cutler, who is coming up with gluten-free options to “enhance the experience for skiers.”

Nearby, a popular donut truck that has served hot, sugary, gourment discs to downhillers for a few seasons goes inside this year. Urban Sugar Donuts is renovating a bricks and mortar space, former Bob’s Clam Hut, at Sugarloaf Mountain’s base lodge to serve more doughnuts to more people. “With more space we can have extra staff and a larger menu,” said owner Kevin Sandes.

Mini cake donuts, in decadent flavors such as maple glazed, bourbon cream with candied bacon, and chicken and waffles with chicken skin and honey sriracha glaze go like hot cakes. Sandes, who brews Tandem Coffee Roasters java, expects to be open by the Christmas rush.

Meanwhile, Sunday River gets a shot in the arm this year when Rockin’ & Roastin’ Café & Restaurant opens in Newry. Headed up by Aerosmith drummer Joey Kramer and Les Otten, former vice chairman of the Boston Red Sox, the new dining and drinking venture is sure to be a hotspot. “I am very excited about this,” said Kramer, who will serve his line of richly roasted coffee in the a.m. and steaks and seafood at night augmented by live music from local bands. “It’s a big privilege to work with a guy like Les Otten, he knows the ropes.”

Kramer, who takes over The Phoenix, is increasing the view of the mountains with floor to ceiling windows. By early 2016 guests will be able to drink coffee, or something stronger, with unobstructed views of the trails and glades.

“This is my first shot at it. It will be different,” said Kramer, who now lives in Austin, Texas, but plans to buy a condo at Sunday River. “The food will be gourmet, the coffee the best.”

The venue features a cafe by morning and live music and dining at night. It will be open year-round. “I want everyone to have good time and be happy,” said the rock star-turned-food entrepreneur.

Back at the ‘Loaf, Sugarloaf Mountain Hotel’s 45 North restaurant features locally sourced pork belly and Delmonico steak. Such upscale offerings after a day of navigating moguls, is a sight for sore eyes (and muscles). Grilled steak, with garlic confit butter, sauteed potatoes and spinach served on a wooden plank, is a signature dish.

From intimate high-end dining, to fast grabs, no matter where you turn this year, good grub abounds in ski country.

Formerly the Double Diamond, 45 North experiments with new forms of cooking. Methods such as sous vide, a temperature-controlled technique that cooks food in vacuum-sealed pouches, achieves optimal outcomes. Modern cuisine for upwardly mobile skiers.

From intimate high-end dining, to fast grabs, no matter where you turn this year, good grub abounds in ski country.

Between the two trucks there is something for every family member,” said Cutler. “What we are doing complements what Sugarloaf is doing at the mountain.”

From aprés, to pre ski to mid-day pick-me-ups, a taste sensation awaits shussers this winter.
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Fly fishing in the winter?

While some of us pack our fly rods away come the first sign of cold weather, other diehards keep fishing throughout the winter . . . and they don’t drill holes in the ice to do so. Master Maine guide Kevin McKay shares a few tips on winter fly fishing.

Imagine standing in a river in December, the air is still, everything is white, there isn’t a soul around. It is 30 degrees out – just comfortable with all your gear on – and a light snow starts. I think this is the most at peace I am when fishing. There is something about fishing in the winter or doing anything in the winter on those perfect days. The world seems still and all is right in the world. Fishing in the winter can be the best time to be out but some of the toughest fishing.

Doing any sport in the winter in Maine can be tough but dressing properly will make all the difference. While fly fishing in one of the state’s many year-round streams, I start with a thin pair of socks followed by a pair of heavy ones, sometime with foot warmers depending how much I will be standing in the river. On my legs I wear a pair of long johns with fleece pants over them and a pair of Simms Gore-Tex waders. Some like the neoprene waders with the boot foot attached. These will keep you warmer. On my top half I’ll wear an Under Armour-type shirt with a T-shirt over it, then a fleece shirt zip-up with a fleece jacket and a Patagonia vest over that. I top it off with my Simms Vortex wading jacket. A winter hat and flip over fingerless gloves and for the most part I can stay pretty comfortable. I wouldn’t say warm – I am standing in a river.

Now that I am dressed I have to decide where I will be fishing, typically I head to southern Maine. It’s usually a little warmer down there but Maine has some great open-season waters all over the state, but I usually fish what I know this time of year in hopes of hooking up. If you go to maine.gov/ifw/fishing/index.htm, they list all the open waters for the state and also the laws, which you should check because they change often. A few rivers I like to fish include the St. George, Presumpscot and Mousam. All have a pretty good stocking program, so my odds of hooking up are a little better. Plus there can be some good holdover fish which end up being quite large.

When fishing these rivers later in the season, I find you have to nymph. The fish are slowing down as the water gets colder, just like us in the winter. So the fly has to be presented right in front of the fish. Sometimes the take will be so subtle that I use an indicator on my leader to detect a strike. I’ll run a 9-foot leader and adjust indicator to the depths of the water, usually 1½ times the depth. I will add and subtract small split shots depending on the speed of the water and how fast I want the flies down on the bottom. My flies consist of #8 stoneflies with a variety of flies trailing off the end, #20 brassies, copper johns, pheasant tails, egg patterns often work the best, but flip some rocks to see what the dominant insect is for the time of year you are fishing.

As you can see I don’t go out there to catch a ton of fish but for me I get the jitters in the winter if I am not fishing. I find I get my fix of standing in the river and forgetting all the stresses of my life. I think on those perfect winter days of no wind and sitting on the bank of the river with the warm sun on my face, I am at peace and all seems right.

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Ski Lessons
They Don’t Teach in Class

Like many Mainers, I grew up looking forward to regular trips to the local ski hill.

In our case, back in the late 1960s, that hill was a now-defunct bump called Ski Horse. Decades have passed since then – I’m 51 now, after all – but those early memories remain.

I remember shredding the palms of my soggy ski gloves while clutching the rough rope tow with a death grip.

I remember trying to sit still as one of my parents cinched me into my leather lace-up boots – my brother had the only pair of modern, plastic “buckle-boots,” as we called them – and hitching myself up to skis that were made of wood.

I remember that every time we had to go inside and use the bathroom – usually when we were already spiking a 10 on the Bathroom Urgency Scale – it was a mad rush to see if we’d successfully get our snow pants off before suffering a tragically embarrassing accident.

I remember learning to turn and stop, and wondering why on earth anyone would ever want to do such things.

Turning, we had already learned, slowed us down.
And we didn’t want any part of that.

Now, as a responsible adult who still enjoys strapping on the boards and making some turns a few days a year, I chuckle at that fearless early version of myself.

Kids bounce, I’ve heard parents say in the years since then. They’re practically made of rubber, in fact.

Nowadays, I watch the little kids crash, shake my head, and, so long as they clamber back upright, I chuckle.

I used to do that, too. What was I thinking?
The answer, of course, is simple: Not much. Not much at all.

Back when we were made of rubber, we were all fearless, I suppose. But somewhere along the way, many of us learned something.

Getting hurt? It hurts.

My first glimpse of that reality came back in the Ski Horse days, though I’m quite certain that I was still too young to realize that I might have actually contributed to my epic crash.

All I know is that when my dad got to the spot where I lay, crumpled on the snow, and picked me up, an odd thing happened: My right leg, which had been facing the wrong direction, immediately spun back to its natural position, waggling loosely.

To this day, I picture my ski as the propeller on one of those balsa-wood gliders we used to get at Christmas. My knee? That was the rubber band. It hurt, but I wasn’t injured. A few days of limping, and I was good as new.

I should have learned a lesson that day, but that’s not how things work.

It took a six-year hiatus from the sport – from about seventh grade until I was in college – to truly cure me of my reckless ways.

I was (apparently) learning during those years, you see.

And even though my parents (and anyone who knew me back then) would likely dispute this fact, here’s what happened: I found common sense.

Hills are steep, you see. Mountains? Even steeper. And me? I don’t like pain.

Nowadays, I opt for intermediate trails. I turn more often than necessary – slows you down, don’t you know – and stop frequently to rest, take in the sights, and let the crazy rubber kids whoosh by.

I often share insight with my own step children, all of whom are better skiers than I.

Sometimes they even listen.

But sometimes, I just like sitting alone on the chairlift, watching new generations of the former me hightail it down our favorite mountain.

One day, I think I even saw myself.

“I’m peeeeeeee-ing!” a young boy announced, shouting over his shoulder to his mother, who was frantically trying to catch up. “And I … don’t … like … it!”

Of course you don’t, I thought. Neither did I.

John Holyoke, BDN Outdoors Writer
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