

Carolina Explorers magazine

Winter 2017

10 Reasons to Love the Season

Carolina Conifers

Lookin' for Lichens

The Continental Divide

Fire: Friend of the Forest?

Plus a mini poster, word search and more!

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4 10 Reasons to Love the Season

Some people can't wait for Spring to arrive. But there are so many reasons to enjoy the winter months! For starters, winter gives us a chance to look at nature in a different light. Take a look at these ten reasons and we think you'll agree... winter is a lovable season!



8 Carolina Conifers

Conifers come in many shapes and sizes, and are among the tallest, largest and oldest plants on Earth. Learn more about North Carolina's wide variety of pines, firs, spruces, hemlocks, and cypresses.



12 Eastern Continental Divide

North America has several continental divides, one of which runs through our state's mountain region. Find out how this boundary influences the streams, rivers and watersheds on either side of our local divide.



Cover Photo: Winter conifers, courtesy of VisitNC.com

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14 Lookin' for Lichens

Winter is a great time to look for lichens! The Knowledgeable Gnome shares some interesting tidbits about the fascinating life of these fungi-algae organisms.



16 Fire: Friend of the Forest?

Fire can be a scary and powerful force. But some fires can also be extremely beneficial, especially for nature. Learn more about how *prescribed* or *controlled* burns are helping us restore some of North Carolina's most unique ecosystems.



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Editor: Tamara M. Seymour
N.C. Certified Environmental Educator
Certified Blue Ridge Naturalist

Science and Education reviewers for the Winter 2017 issue:

Jennifer Birdsall, *Biologist*
Kim S. Davis, *STEM Director*
Jeri Minford, *Educator*
Lynn Primm,
Water Compliance Specialist
Dr. James Henson,
Knowledgeable Gnome

Junior Editor: Brittney Storey
Carolina Explorers Magazine:
PO Box 713
Banner Elk, NC 28604
E-mail: tamara@NCexplorers.com

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Hike Back in History Groundhog Day



On February 2, we will find out whether spring weather will arrive early, or if the winter weather will drag on for another six weeks—but only if you believe in the forecast of a groggy groundhog who has just awakened from his winter slumber, or *hibernation*.

On this day, when an "official" groundhog pokes his head through the hole to his burrow and sees his shadow (most likely on a sunny day), folklore says we will have to endure a longer winter. No shadow means an early spring.

The origin of Groundhog Day is thought to date back to ancient times when people celebrated the halfway point between the winter solstice and spring equinox. As the story goes, if that midway day was warm and sunny, the second half of winter would be harsh. If the day was cold and cloudy, warm weather was on its way.

In 1887, *Punxsutawney Phil* of Pennsylvania became the official groundhog forecaster for the U.S. But North Carolina also has an official furry forecaster, *Sir Walter Wally*. Even though Wally has been doing this job for a mere 21 years compared to Phil's 130 years, our local weather woodchuck gets it right nearly 50 percent of the time compared to Phil's measly 40 percent! ■

How well do you know your groundhogs? Take this quick quiz and find out...

1. What is another common name for the groundhog?
2. The scientific name of the groundhog is:
 - a) *Woodchuckus familiaris*
 - b) *Marmota monax*
 - c) *Bucktoothus carolinensis*
3. Groundhogs are
 - a) herbivores
 - b) carnivores
 - c) omnivores
4. True or false? The groundhog is native to North Carolina.
5. True or false? Groundhogs live in every county of our state.

(answers on pg. 20)

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