

Animal's Favorite Weather

If animals could pick their favorite seasons and weather, what would they choose? Winter - cold and snowy, with little or no plants to be harvested; Spring - rainy, with plants budding, Summer - hot and humid, with plants and grasses flourishing; Autumn - damp and chilly, with vegetation starting to go dormant. There are votes for each season; some of them may be a bit surprising.

WINTER & SNOW

While some small mammals are sleeping away the winter, many remain active beneath an insulating layer of snow. Snow creates a microclimate of relatively constant temperature above freezing. It also provides protection from predators. Many rodents—shrews, voles and mice—have relatively low mortality rates in winter. They remain quite active, and many breed during this time.



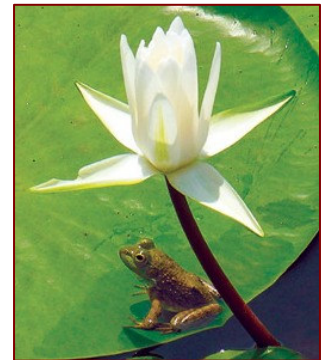
Owls mate in January and the nestlings hatch in February. The babies will have enough food when rodents and rabbits have their first litters.

Beavers spend time in their lodges, getting ready for the arrival of babies in late winter. Raccoons and skunks emerge from their dens on sunny days to check things out.

SPRING & RAIN

Among the first signs of spring are the mating calls of frogs and toads. Flooded fields, ditches, small woodland ponds, prairie ponds and just plain puddles are possibilities for nurseries. Each species has a distinct call and the males join together to form a chorus.

The songbirds are defending territories, building nests and hatching babies. Rains bring worms to the surface making the parents' job a bit easier. Seed eaters can gobble tree seeds - maple, oak and elm are prolific in our area.



Squirrels and opossums are caring for the first litters of the year (both species have two litters annually). The babies feast on mom's milk and mom feasts on fresh green shoots and buds. The first litters of bunnies are chomping on dandelions and clover.

Fawns are born in May, just as the grasses are emerging from winter dormancy; their spots help to camouflage them on the edges of woodlands as the trees leaf out.

SUMMER & HEAT

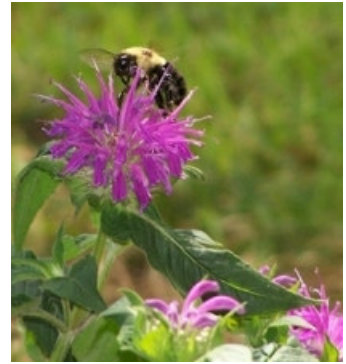
Honeybees are working overtime to make enough honey to ensure that the hive survives the winter.

Coyote pups, bobcat kittens and fox kits emerge from their dens. Mom watches them carefully as they play; all these games teach them skills they will need when they are on their own.

Hawks and vultures take advantage of the thermals and soar for hours at a time - watching for prey. A vulture spends almost the entire day in the sky and rarely flaps his wings.

The songbirds have fledged and are on their own. Insects are plentiful so both parents and young birds are eating steadily to make sure that they have the strength for their long migrations.

At the end of summer - in late August or early September - the second litters of opossums and squirrels are born. Rabbits, of course, have produced litters every month.



AUTUMN & HARVEST

The days are becoming shorter though food is even more plentiful than it was during the heat of the summer. The hibernators are stocking up for the long winter's sleep and the migrators are almost ready to depart. Honeybees are making last-minute visits to the late-blooming flowers to make sure they have enough for the winter.

Even though they don't hibernate, squirrels are busily harvesting nuts and caching them for winter food. Skunks and raccoons are cleaning out their dens and filling them with provisions.

The raptors are hunting by themselves, though the parents will watch over them for a while yet. Foxes, coyotes and bobcats are establishing their own territories near their parents' hunting grounds. Beavers and muskrats stay together in family groups during winter.

The trees are decking themselves with autumn color before they go dormant for the winter. The bunnies are nursing the last litters until spring.



WHICH IS YOUR FAVORITE?

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