

HOW TO APPRECIATE THE

WINTER LANDSCAPE TIP FROM A NATURALIST

"People are apt to think that there's nothing much to see in the winter woods," explains Mary Ellsworth, director of the Nankin Mills Nature Center. "Actually, there's a great deal to see. The winter landscape is much simpler than it is in summer and this gives observers a chance to see much more than they might in the summer."

Trees, for example, are shorn of their summer foliage, thus revealing a variety of branch and twig shapes that are fascinating in design. Each tree has its own personality--some are graceful and lithe, others stark and twisted--and this can best be appreciated right now in the midwinter season.

The particularly rough bark of such trees as the sycamore and hackberry can best be observed now, too; watch for these things on your nature trail and you'll find your eyes opening to sights you may have never known before.

WATCHING FOR animal tracks in the snow is another game you might play while out in the winter woods. Miss Ellsworth reminds hikers to watch for the footprints of a great variety of woodland creatures --

foxes, raccoons, possums, muskrats, squirrels and rabbits. If you're lucky -- and very quiet -- you might discover the animals themselves.

"We tell groups on nature trails that we're actually trespassing on animal homes," explains Miss Ellsworth. "That's why it's important to leave the area undisturbed and to remove nothing from it. Noisy, messy visitors are apt to have a lonely hike; quiet ones will often be rewarded by the sights of many animals as they go about their lives in the forest."

Winter hikers can also be on the look-out for animal homes--a "den" tree with hollows is apt to be the shelter for a family of squirrels as well as a home for birds. Such trees are often dead but are left alone because of their usefulness to wide numbers of wild creatures.

Winter, with its absence of foliage, is an excellent time to spot birds. While some of our feathered friends take off for the south during the cold weather, a surprising number remain right here.

Miss Ellsworth suggests that observers watch for woodpeckers, bluejays, crows, chickadees, winter

goldfinches, titmice, morning doves, cardinals, as well as the numerous everyday variety of starlings and sparrows.

Visiting birds from climates north of the Observer area come here for a winter that is mild by contrast to those in their native Upper Peninsula and Canadian homelands. Such northern visitors as the junco and the grosbeak may be seen on a hike through a nearby nature trail.

STILL MORE surprises await you in the winter woods. See how many varieties of dried berries and flower-heads you can find--although be careful not to taste anything, because, as Miss Ellsworth points out, many of them may be poisonous. The poison ivy, for example, produces a berry that can be frequently seen on winter outings.

Miss Ellsworth encourages all groups to visit the Nature Center at Nankin Mills this winter. She personally guides tours herself, such as the one along the Acorn Trail, adjacent to the Nature Center.

Visiting groups may bring lunches which can be eaten either inside or outside, depending on the weather, and return to the Nature Center after



their hikes for a question and answer period.

So open your eyes and ears to a series of rare treats and uncover, for yourself, some of the secrets that hide in the wintry woods, undisturbed by the 20th century world that man has created.

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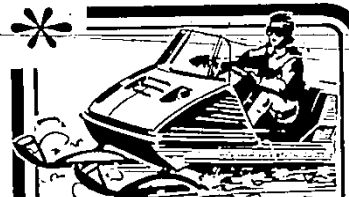
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