



Do You Know.....?

about hibernation? While many of our songbirds fly south to escape the cold of winter, our native mammals have to tough it out. Foxes, raccoons, skunks, rabbits, deer and any number of other animals remain active throughout the year. During severe spells of weather, these animals will take refuge in a den, brush pile or thick stand of trees and wait until things ease up a bit to resume foraging for food.

Unable to migrate to warmer climes, some mammals have turned to the next best thing: hibernation. Of the mammals that live in our area, only the groundhog (woodchuck) truly hibernates. When daylight hours shorten, temperatures drop and vegetation turns brown and dies, the groundhog enters its burrow, curls up and goes into a deep sleep. Having fattened up from Summer's bounty, the groundhog can spend as much as nine months in a state of near suspended animation. From personal experience (see the October 1997 issue of Second Thoughts), we can tell you that attempting to awaken a hibernating groundhog is practi-

cally impossible. Their body temperature drops to a level just warm enough to keep them from freezing, their breathing and heart rate slow dramatically, they neither eat nor drink nor do they eliminate body wastes. They remain in this state until lengthening days and warmer temperatures tell them it is time to return to the world of the living.

Although tree squirrels remain active all year, snoozing only through the very worst day to two, chipmunks often partially hibernate for several months. The chipmunk will sleep for 3-4 days then wake up to eat and eliminate. Some will emerge during that time and can be seen scampering around throughout the winter. Other chipmunks remain below ground in their burrows until Spring. Generally, they have stored plenty of food, as much as a bushel, which causes one to wonder if there is such a thing as a hungry adult chipmunk. Whether the individual animal remains active or goes below ground is anyone's guess. A chipmunk may remain active one year and stay tunnel-bound the next for reasons yet to be determined.

Beavers remain active all year but you may



not spot one during prolonged cold spells. If the beaver pond freezes, the animals rely on branches they have anchored into the bottom of the pond to sustain them until the next thaw. The larder is usually some distance from their lodge and, if the pond freezes solidly, the animals will starve to death as they are unable to exit the lodge and are not adapted to hibernation.

Several species of bats hibernate, often seeking out caves that have been used for centuries. If the bats are disturbed during their winter sleep, they will arouse. Waking from a torpid state uses a great deal of energy and



thousands of bats die when thoughtless amateur spelunkers (cave explorers), repeatedly disturb them.

So, remember, when Winter dons its snowy mantle, countless animals are safe and secure in their burrows waiting for the gentle breezes of Summer to emerge and delight all of us who quietly observe.

NOW, YOU KNOW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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