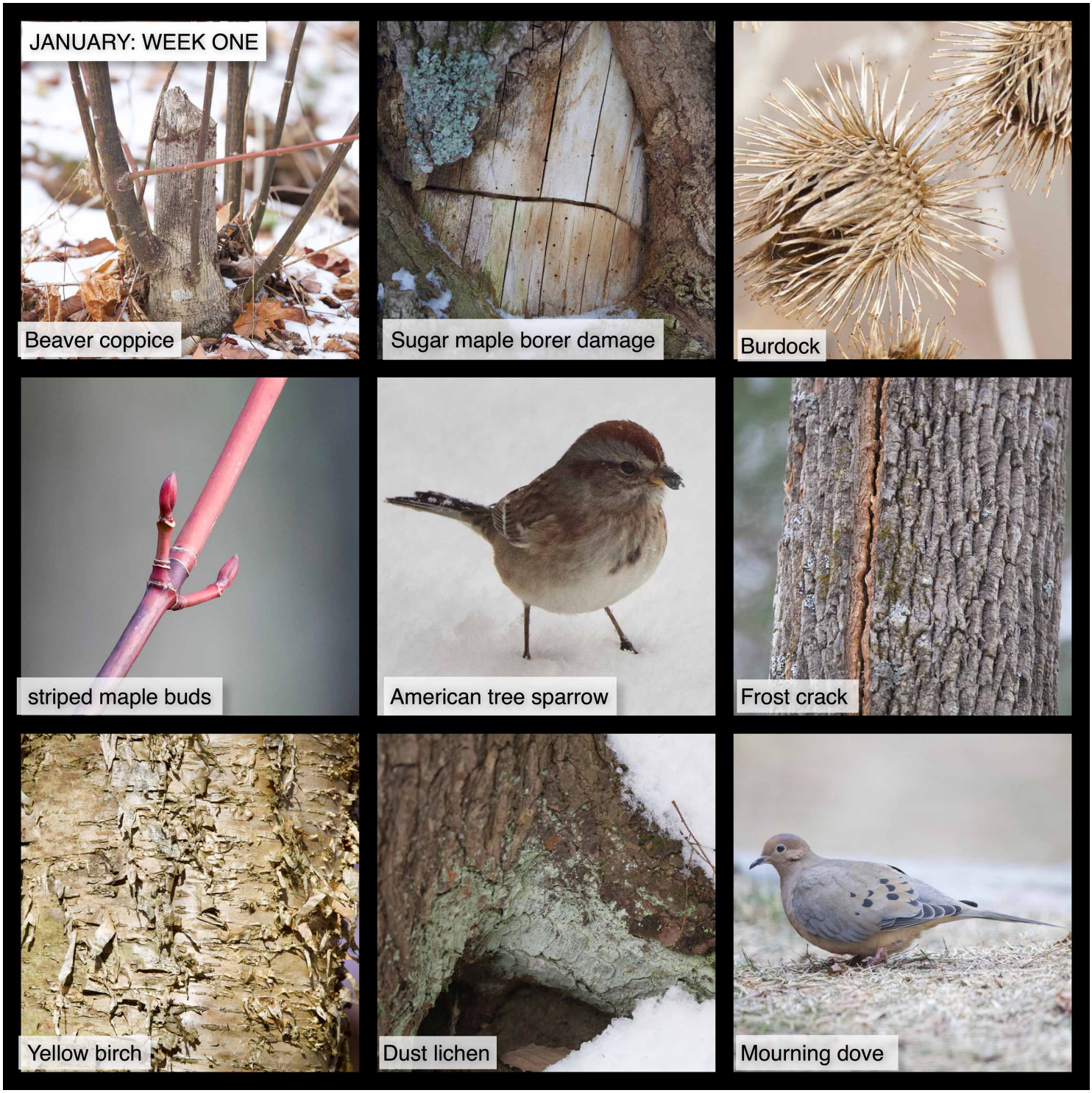
This Week in the Woods January: Week One



This Week in the Woods, we visited an old beaver pond which has drained out to become a damp meadow, surrounded by small tree stumps sprouting new stems. This is a natural example of **coppicing**, and as Joe Rankin notes in this *Outside Story* essay, most hardwoods have this regenerative ability, although they don't all use the same approach: "Sometimes sprouts are produced by dormant buds that remain immersed in the bark until the tree is stressed or injured and then are prompted to break dormancy. Other sprouts are produced from pads of juvenile

callus formed from mature living wood cells." As Brett McLeod notes in this article from the Autumn 2013 issue of *Northern Woodlands* magazine, coppicing is also an age-old technique for producing firewood, fence posts and other small diameter wood. The sprouts grow rapidly because they're powered by established rootstock.

If you discover a barkless patch on a sugar maple, revealing what at first glance looks like a saw-made cut, you may be looking at a scar from a **sugar maple borer** larva. This is a common long-horned wood boring beetle that spends two years in the tree before emerging as a bright yellow and black beetle. As noted in this profile from the U.S. Forest Service, in the insect's second year, it emerges from winter stasis to mine (make a tunnel by eating) the sapwood under the bark, partially encircling a branch or bole. Old damage doesn't always take the form of an exposed tunnel; you can see another typical presentation at the U.S. Forest service link.

We've previously mentioned **striped maple (moose maple)** in this series, noting that one of its alternative names, **goose foot**, refers to the shape of its leaves. The leaves are long gone, but young stems are an eye-catching rosy pink. Another reason you may notice striped maple in winter is that deer and moose are fond of feeding on its cambium, which they acquire by making long upward gashes with their lower incisors. Here's a profile on the species from Adirondacks Forever Wild.

It's cold, and **burdock** burrs would like to borrow your coat. There are two species common to our region, both non-natives that often show up in fields, meadows and in disturbed areas such as roadsides. As Lisa Olney notes in this *Outside Story* essay, the seed-containing burrs are equipped with rows of tiny hooks that latch onto clothing, dog fur, and pretty much anything else that brushes by them. Here's a Native Plant Trust profile of common burdock, and a video documenting an event mentioned in Olney's essay: the South Queensferry, Scotland, annual Burryman Parade, in which a man covered head-to-feet in burs, walks miles through the town, fortified by frequent sips of whiskey.

American tree sparrows – pretty gray-and-rusty brown birds with spots on their chests – are showing up in yards and at feeders, and squabbling with each other over seeds. Despite their name, these northern birds (they breed in Canada, up near the tree line) are not tree dwellers, but nest in more open areas, including thickets and the edges of wetlands. Here's a profile of the species from Audubon, along with a sobering map predicting loss of much of their breeding habitat to climate change.

Does frost crack trees? Yes and no. As Michael Snyder explains in this essay from the Northern Woodlands archive, most **frost cracks** originate from prior damage in a tree. The sequence goes like this: wounds in the sapwood retain moisture; chilled air makes this water freeze and

therefore rapidly expand; pressure from this expansion splits open the wound and makes it bigger – and sometimes, the action of this sudden split produces a sound like a gunshot. As we noted in a previous blog, Snyder (Vermont's Commissioner of Forests, Parks, and Recreation) recently published a collection of his "Woods Whys" essays – a great resource for the tree-curious. You can find out more about the book here.

The sunlit bark of **yellow birch** is a bright sight in the January woods. One of our largest hardwoods, and a commercially valuable species, it's also beautiful; its tattered bark often has a metallic sheen, and its roots may appear above the soil, gripping boulders or looping over air where logs used to be but have rotted away. Here's a profile from Paul Smith's College's Visitor Interpretative Center, which notes the tree's wildlife value, and also its wintergreen scent, which you can test for yourself by scraping a twig.

Dust lichen (more than one species) is common, and glows above the snow at the base of trees. Its powdery texture and paint spatter form, as well as its pale green color, make it especially attractive. The most common kind of dust lichen is *Lepraria lobificans*, a.k.a. "fluffy dust lichen," but as is often the case with lichens, it's difficult to identify conclusively.

Mourning doves are hanging around feeders, as snow makes other food sources less accessible. As Michele Patenaude notes in this *Outside Story* essay, these birds are newcomers to the north, and like other southern species (looking at you, Virginia opossum), are prone to frost bite. The reason they're here is that they've successfully hitched their star to humans and expanded their range; they benefit from the kind of semi-open habitat that people create, and they now breed in every state, including Hawaii. A fascinating detail about these birds: both the male and female provide their offspring "milk." This is a slurry of cells that the young drink from their parents' beaks, "sloughed off from the crop wall." As Patenaude explains, "crop milk is the consistency of cottage cheese, and is extremely nutritious, having more protein and fat than mammalian milk." Here's a profile from the Cornell Lab's "All About Birds" website, which notes that these birds are especially graceful flyers.

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Northern Woodlands
PO Box 270, Lyme, New Hampshire 03768
mail@northernwoodlands.org / 603-795-0660
www. northernwoodlands.org