

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm jess_tabolt@hotmail.com

Title: Fall's "Mud Season" Offers a Full Rainbow of Color

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When you think of New England's late fall and early winter in your mind's eye, what words come to mind? Cold. Dark. Drab. Dull. After the last of October's brilliant foliage has left us, what does a person stimulated by their senses in the outdoor world have to look forward to?

The landscape that surrounds us in the lengthening time period between last foliage and first snowfall can seem uninviting. If we take the time to immerse ourselves in the woods, we can find a whole array of colorful surprises awaiting us.

A simple color scavenger hunt can simultaneously impress the youngest and the oldest woods wanderers. Take a late fall or early winter walk in a local woodland near you, and challenge yourselves to find every color of the rainbow. You'll be delighted with what you can find! Lichens, liverworts and fungi cheerfully flash reds, yellows and oranges; coloration that warns all would-be predators of their toxic potential. Scintillating flashes of crystal gleam from ponds, pools and even soil as frost transforms water into ice. Mosses and hardy herbs like wintergreen, maintain their deep calming green all winter.

Color schemes aside, another wonderful part of mud season is the depth perspective that you can get without all that lush green foliage in the way. On a simple woods walk, you can see long distances through the woods, allowing hunters and wildlife watchers to see their targets hundreds of yards away. If you hike to a high point on the landscape, you can look down to see the various folds and crevices of the forest floor that leaves usually hide.

This time of year, my woodstove beckons me to stay indoors. But if you can break away from this monotony and get outside, you will be amazed at what an afternoon in mud season's landscape can do for your soul.



Photo caption: Searching for every color of the rainbow in the woods through every season can help to sharpen every nature lover's observation skills.