



Mudpuppy's Pond

Our Handsome Winter Visitor

by Diane Clark

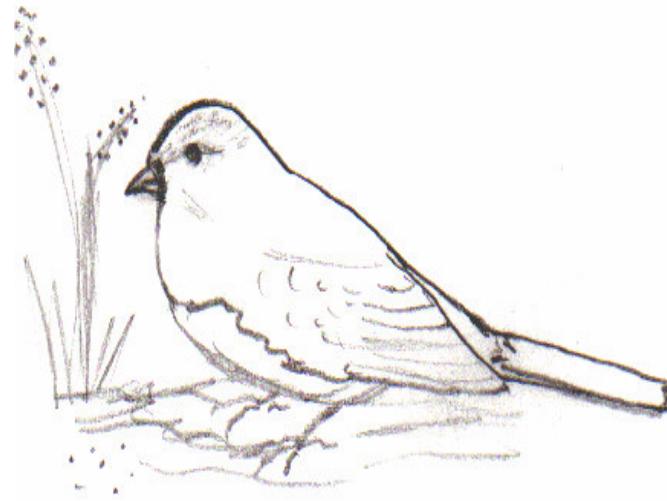
Every October, as many of the songbirds we've watched all summer are migrating south to warmer climates for the winter, a charming little bird dressed in formal attire arrives to brighten our dreary winter months.

Known as the *Snowbird*, it is the **Slate-Colored Junco**. A member of the Sparrow family, the Junco likes to visit bird feeders, but you'll usually spot him on the ground, eating the seed that has been spilled by other visitors. You'll recognize him by the tuxedo he wears: a dark gray body with a white belly. The females are a lighter gray, with brown on their wings. Both male and female have pink bills and white feathers on the outer edges of their tails.

The Junco spends his summer months in Canada and Alaska, so coming here to spend his winters is like taking a trip to Florida for us! Sometime in April, you'll notice that our handsome little friend has disappeared. Don't worry. He's just gone back north for the summer; he'll see you again when the leaves start to turn.

Color the Junco the way we described him.

Sprinkle bird seed on the ground in your yard and see if you can spot a Junco yourself!



Life begins in the Dead of Winter

by Mel Haney

This is the time of year we call the dead of winter, but right now in your neighborhood, the wild animals are courting and having babies, so maybe we should call it the *life* of winter.

Squirrels are the first to have babies. As you read this, many mother squirrels are caring for their babies in a cozy leaf nest. The babies are born bald, but start growing hair right away. Their eyes will open after four weeks and their mother will nurse them for about eight weeks. By the time they're ready to leave the nest, it will be spring; trees and plants will be leafing out and there will be food for them to gather.

Many other warm-blooded animals follow this pattern. First come courtship and the mother becomes pregnant in the deep part of winter. Her babies are born while it's still very cold and the parents must keep them warm and well-fed. When spring brings milder weather and more food, the young ones are ready to begin leaving their nests. They'll have many months of good weather and abundant food to learn to live on their own before another winter sets in.

In January: Squirrels are born. Beaver, foxes, raccoons, and bobcats begin courting; their babies will be born in March and April.

In February: Great horned owls and screech owls lay their eggs; the baby owls, called owlets, hatch in late February and early March. Least shrews and river otters are born. Opossum babies are born and climb into their mother's pouch to develop. Groundhogs, mink, and skunks begin courting. On warm days (above 60 degrees), rabbits begin breeding.

So, as you can see, the dead of winter actually is full of life!



This baby gray squirrel was probably born in a cozy leaf nest while you were still wearing your winter coat and mittens! (photo: Carol DeRuse)