

National parks winter wonderland

In the language of the Inuit there are at least a dozen common expressions, and numerous special ones, for the word "snow." Although most Canadians probably consider one word sufficient, words fail them when the time comes to describe these incredible crystals.

It is not easy to describe that magic white powder which makes Canadian winters so breathtakingly beautiful.

In Canada's national parks, winter is simply spectacular. Snow transforms already picturesque parklands into dazzling worlds of white. Silence fills the wilderness, giving the impression of impenetrable serenity. This atmosphere of calm is deceiving. Beneath the thick layer of quiet there is much activity: squirrels scurry back and forth from their food reserves, black bears nurse newly-born cubs, and burrowed beneath the snow, mice and woodchucks hibernate.



The black bear is not a true hibernator. Its body temperature remains almost normal and its rate of metabolism is only slightly reduced. In true hibernates, like the doormouse and the woodchuck, body temperatures fall until they are almost equal to that of the surrounding atmosphere.

The black bear does not store food. In late autumn, it gorges itself with a variety of wild fruit and berries, fish and carrion. When the temperature



drops below freezing, the bear retires to a rocky den or cave to while away the winter.

Occasionally, particularly if the weather warms up unexpectedly, the bear awakens. It may search for food and drink, or merely roll over and go back to sleep. During the winter, the female bear gives birth to twin cubs, each about the size of a squirrel.

Deer concentrate in areas that provide adequate food and shelter from storms and deep snow. Deep snow makes movement difficult, but snow that packs and settles gives the deer extra height, enabling them to reach

high into trees for food.

Several factors combine to create a winter that is good for wildlife. Generally soft, deep snow is best, and it must last. Animals suffer if there is inadequate snowfall, because they are unable to burrow beneath its protective blanket. Frozen rain forms a crust on the surface, preventing animals from seeking food beneath.

Recreation

While animals in the parks prepare for winter, park interpreters are busy preparing for winter visitors. Attendance at Canada's national parks

