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Editor's Note

Getting Out in Wintertime

Ben Katzen; Forest Preserve District of Kane County

Many children do not get to experience the wonders of nature in winter. For many, outdoor winter activities are limited to the sled hill or the yard making snowmen. Valuable lessons can be learned outdoors about life cycles and the struggle for survival in nature. Also, a greater respect can be learned by experiencing the elements that wild animals must endure, and by looking around at the limited food sources available in the winter. This may open discussions about different strategies animals use to survive the winter, and even foster an appreciation for the comforts we enjoy as humans in this country. The Mighty Acorns winter sessions open up this important dimension of wildlife study. Children not only get to observe nature in winter, they also have the opportunity to improve their adopted area by conducting restoration activities. Please check out the winter activity sheet included in this issue, and have a wonderful winter season!



Fun Facts Snowflakes

If you are outside while it is snowing, take a careful look at the flakes that land on our coat or mittens. (Be careful not to breathe on them, though, or they will melt). They will be lacy, symmetrical, 6-sided crystals (hexagons). And no two will be exactly alike!!

If snowflakes fall from high, very cold clouds, they are tiny and either six-sided columns or three-sided plates. If they fall from low, comparatively warm clouds then they are larger — perhaps as much as one-half inch in diameter — and several are apt to be combined into one big flake. The individual crystal will be either a six-pointed star, or a solid hexagon with six identical inlaid designs, or a combination of the two.

The richness of design is caused by minute air tubes; and the hexagonal form is due to the fact that a molecule of water is composed of 2 parts hydrogen and 1 part oxygen, crystallized directly from vapor into solid form. Had they gone through a liquid stage, these snow crystals would be lumps of hail or sleet — not doilies knitted in the clouds, stitch by stitch.

What the scientist cannot answer is why, in each crystal, its own peculiar pattern is repeated perfectly on each of its six sides. No mineral crystals approach the beauty, diversity and perfect symmetry of snow. The philosopher sees here a key to the growth, variety and pattern of life itself.



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