Ferrum Nature Society

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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Nature's Events

- **Flowers emerging:** Crocuses and daffodils are beginning to emerge and some will bloom this month.
- **Early amphibians**: Wood frogs and Spring peepers will start to call - listen for them on warmer wet evenings.
- **Birds of a feather**: Goldfinches begin their spring molt so look for hints of the males bright yellow color.
- **Spring practice**: Many birds will start their mating and territorial calls.
- **Snow?:** February has been our snowiest month. Recall that last year, we had 8 inches of the fluffy stuff on February 27th.

Sky calendar:

Full moon - February 12
The snow moon.

Planets— Look for Mars nearly directly overhead during most of the evening. Saturn is not too far away, further to the East. Mercury is in the West after sunset. Venus and Jupiter can be found in the Southeast in the early morning hours.

Look for the Winter Hexagon - Todd Fredericksen

The winter hexagon is the most prominent astronomical feature in the winter sky. It is a hexagon that links six constellations and contains some of the brightest stars visible in the sky from late Fall to early Spring. Constellations include Orion, Canis major, Canis minor, Curiga, Gemini, and Taurus. To find the winter hexagon, look for the brightest star in the winter sky, Sirius. Sirius is the lowest part of the winter hexagon. From Sirius, move up and to the right and find the bright star, Rigel, in the constellation of the hunter, Orion. Orion is the one with the belt and the sword. Move up and slightly to the right and find the bright red star, Aldebaran in the constellation Taurus, the bull. From Aldebaran, move to the top of the hexagon and find the bright blue star Capella in the constellation Auriga. From Capella, move down and to the left to find the head stars of the constellation Gemini, Castor and Pollux. Finally, move almost straight down and to little dog constellation, Canis Minor, and find the bright star, Procyon.

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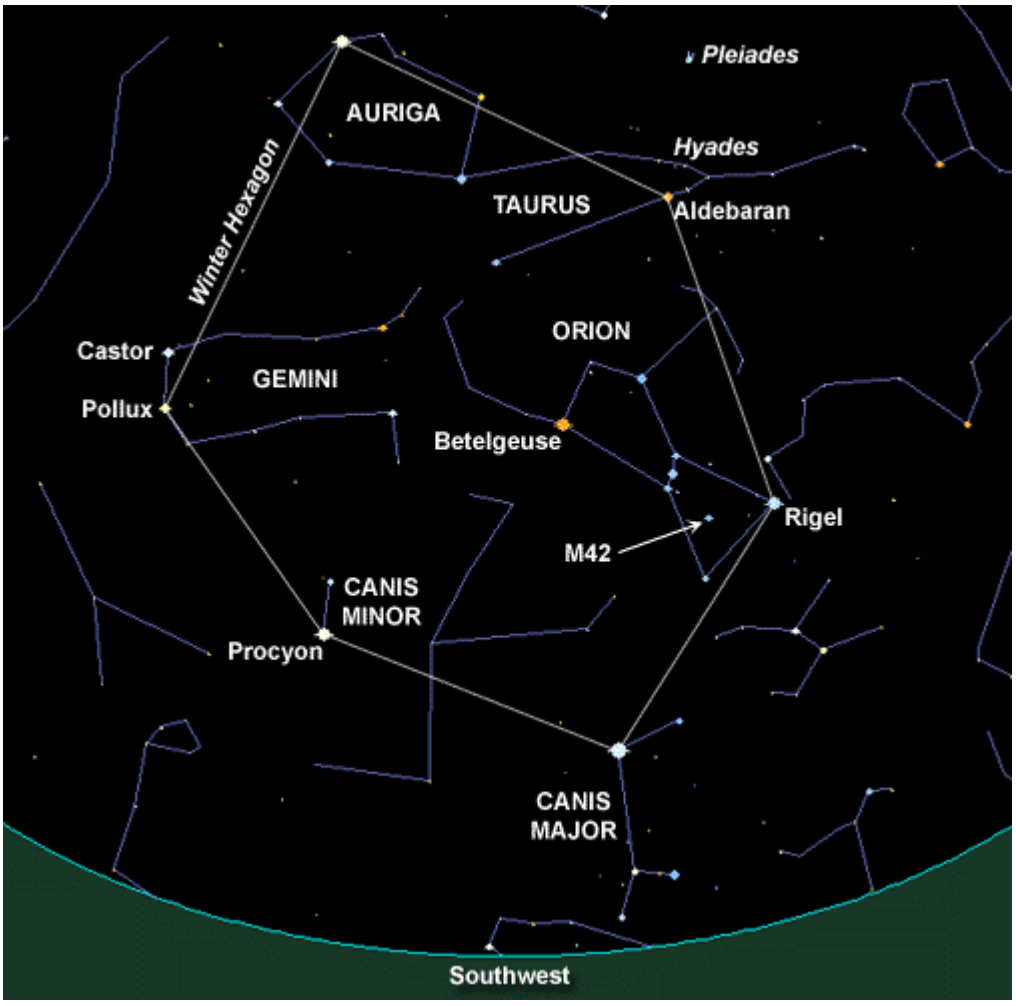

Malicious Moles ??

- Nell Fredericksen

This time of year you may notice the appearance of raised ridges meandering through your yard. This indicates the activity of one of our three native moles. The most common is the eastern mole (*Saclopus aquaticus*) and is the one most often responsible for lawn damage. But with the large amount of forest in our area we can also be visited by the star-nosed mole (*Condylura cristata*) and the hairy-tailed mole (*Parascalops breweri*). All moles are fossorial, spending the majority of their lives below ground.

Moles average 6-8 inches in length and are characterized by a long, tapered beak-like nose (or in the case of the star-nosed mole - a hairless nose ringed with 22 pink fleshy "tentacles"), tiny rudimentary eye, large paddle like front feet with long claws, and a soft velvety fur. Moles are active year round, keeping to deeper burrows during the winter. They mate in Feb–March and, following a 5-6 week gestation period, the young appear mid-April through May. Females have only one litter per year of from 2 – 6 young. Moles are not rodents, belonging to the mammal group of insectivores. They feed mainly on earthworms but also eat a large quantity of insects that live in the soil, and at times may help in controlling some insect outbreaks. An adult mole can consume up to 50 lbs of worms and insects each year.

Moles develop intricate networks of main tunnels 6-8 inches below the surface and then branch off of these to produce surface tunnels used to scout for food. Moles can dig these surface tunnels at a rate of 18 feet per hour. Surface tunnel activity usually only lasts a week or two in any one area since they move around based on food availability. If your yard is surrounded by forest then you undoubtedly will have occasional incursions into your yard by the resident forest population.

Trapping is the most effective control of moles in your yard. There are two forms of live capture that you can utilize, one fairly labor intensive, the other more laid back. The first method is quite simple, but requires locating an active surface tunnel. You can determine activity by compressing several tunnels in your yard and then repeatedly checking them for movement as the mole tries to repair them. Once you have located a busy mole, sneak up on the back side of the tunnel and block off retreat with the spade of a shovel. Have a bucket ready and just scoop the mole up with the shovel and into the bucket, You can then relocate the animal to a wooded or weedy field that is away from any residences. The other method employs pit fall traps placed along active tunnels. These can be made from old coffee cans that are buried into the ground level with the bottom of the tunnel. Cover the top with a square of cardboard weighted slightly with some soil. The mole will travel along the tunnel and fall into the can. These must be checked each morning, and once the moles are caught they can then be relocated.

Saclopus aquaticus - Eastern mole

Condylura cristata - Star nosed mole

Photo courtesy of Kenneth C. Catania