

Critter Corner - Tips for Snowbirds and Hibernators –

Dave deCalesta – December 2015 KLA Newsletter

When we lived on the east side of Keuka Lake opposite the Waterfront restaurant, I would take a walk along the lower lake road after dark, counting homes with lights on (folks were still there) and lights off (folks had gone elsewhere for winter and parts of fall and spring). After Labor Day, the lights-on crowd was a tad under 50%. After Thanksgiving, down to about 20%. After Christmas/New Years, down to 10% and holding steady until spring. My guess is, these numbers pretty much hold for all lakeside owners. We did both: some years we were snowbirds, wintering in Florida, other years we were hibernators, enjoying the winter scenery. What follows are tips for snowbirds and hibernators.

Snowbird Tips	Hibernator Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Critter-proof your lake home for when you are gone: the previous newsletter identified tips on how to critter-proof your lake home for winter. Pull it out and review the steps before you head south. ○ We all keep some level of heat on while we are gone. Those not heating their homes with hot water should turn off the water supply to their home, drain all water lines, drain the hot water heaters, sink traps, and toilet bowls and traps. Disconnect the water leads to your washing machines. Put a cup or so of anti-freeze (you can get the pink liquid used in mobile homes from hardware stores) in the drained toilet bowl, all traps, in the washing machine and in the dishwasher. If you don't have freeze-proof outdoor faucets, buy those little Styrofoam boxes that attach to and cover the outdoor faucets. Hardware stores sell these. Those who can't drain their water lines because they heat with hot water might want to think about investing in the services of a local company that places gizmos in your home which monitor temperature and whether there is water on the floor (caused by leaks). If the temperature in your home goes below a threshold level you set, or if a water line break causes water to pool on the floor, the gizmos alert you via telephone, cell phone, email. Website for the company is: (https://www.sensoredlife.com/#/) ○ Protect your shrubs from hungry deer. We individually wrapped each azalea bush and rhododendron with burlap to keep off the deer and protect them from cold wind. Ditto small trees like arborvitae and rose-of-Sharon. You can buy rolls of burlap in hardware stores. ○ Protect your dock from ice that may lock in dock supports, leading to their destruction when the large sheet of ice around your dock begins to move with spring melt. The best way is with a "bubbler" available at local hardware stores. Suspending a sump pump a foot under water in the front of docks also works. Have a hibernator neighbor check to make sure electricity works and to turn on bubbler/sump pump when ice starts to form and turn off when ice is gone. ○ Disconnect the battery on vehicles you leave behind so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Critter-proofing your home also applies to you hibernators: nothing worse than hearing something in the attic scampering about, or something in the walls going <i>scratch-scratch scratch</i> or <i>chew-chew-chew</i>. ○ Feeding the critters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For the birds, and only for the birds, fill your bird feeders with black oil sunflower seeds and place out suet blocks in suet feeders. Take both in at night so the deer, raccoons, and bears don't feed on them and destroy the feeders in the bargain. And make sure they are squirrel-proof (see previous issues of KLA newsletter for how to do this). Make sure the feeders are close to shrubs and/or conifers like arborvitae so the birds will be protected from hawks. ● Don't feed feral cats! If you do, and you also feed birds, the cats hanging around for handouts will amuse themselves by catching and eating birds visiting your feeders. If you must feed the cats, don't feed the birds. ● Do not feed the deer! We did one year, the initial herd of 2 quickly grew to 20, and they decimated our shrubs while snacking on the corn we put out. Also, it is illegal in NY to feed deer. Winter food (generally corn) put out for deer attracts male bears (they are active all winter), raccoons, and squirrels (like bears they don't hibernate, and may winter in your attic while feasting on the corn). ○ Follow advice for "<i>protect your shrubs</i>" in the Hibernator tips column. Your presence in your home overwinter will not deter the deer one bit. ○ Follow advice in next column over for protecting docks from ice. Also, the open water will attract wintering ducks (mostly redheads and mallards)

the batteries won't go flat, and make sure anti-freeze in the radiator is up to snuff.

- Hire someone to plow your driveway at intervals and place timer lights in bedrooms and living rooms – thieves and break-in artists are less likely to attack homes that appear to be lived in. Advise local sheriffs when you will be gone and ask them to check out your home at intervals. Or have a hibernator friend do it.
- Think about investing in a natural gas-fired generator: if an ice storm or other winter storm knocks out electricity for weeks, your home could freeze (and any water lines you may have forgotten to drain).

and they will feed on aquatic weeds, pretty much eliminating them by spring. 1,000 or so wintering ducks out front is an impressive sight!

- Scan the lake often, migrating loons and whistling swans (one year there were over 100! Of loons and swans) stop in on their way south in fall and north in spring.
- Ditto the generator advice in other column. We had an ice storm down here in Tennessee last year (locals said it never happened before!) and after no power (and no heat – furnaces need electricity) for 5 days we had to drain all water lines, anti-freeze the traps, and skedaddle to a place with heat.

Above all, have a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season!