

# ELF NOTES

*Environmental Learning for the Future - Vermont Institute of Natural Science*  
[www.vinsweb.org/education/elf/volunteers.html](http://www.vinsweb.org/education/elf/volunteers.html)

## **SNOW SHELTER**

One characteristic of snow is its insulating properties, which makes the underground burrows of animals warmer than above ground. You can test this inside a snow fort or *quinzhee*.

To build a *quinzhee*, first find a large open space where the snow is undisturbed. Get a snow shovel and start piling up the snow. It takes a big pile several feet high and wide to make a good-sized shelter for you and friends. Once you've piled the snow, take a rest and let it sit for a few hours or over night. After the snow has set, use a short-handled spade to make a three-foot long, one-person-sized tunnel into the pile at ground level. Then, at the inside end of the tunnel, scoop overhead and to the sides and carry out the snow to create a snow room. Measure temperature inside and out to see the difference.

## **HABITATS**

### **SNUG IN THE SNOW**

To animals that must survive northern winters, snow is a fact of life, and differences in snow cover can mean either survival or death. A blanket of snow is a relatively stable environment that provides insulation, like the fiberglass in the walls of a house or the feathers in a down vest.

Many small animals that are active in winter find warmth, protection, and even food beneath a blanket of snow. Though these critters generally stay beneath the snow in the dark, sheltered zone next to the ground, tracks reveal that they also run across the top of the snow hunting for new food or taking the easiest route to a stored cache.

While some animals use the snow primarily as a protective cover, others make use of it for hunting, roosting, or storing food. Variations in snow consistency can mean life or death to those who walk on it or live in it.

## **ELF NEWS**

