

Villa Elfvik's

Winter Trail



On a Hare's Trail

The Winter Trail around Villa Elfvik will introduce you to the life of a mountain hare. Follow the path to find out why the night-time hopper eats its own pellets, how it escapes foxes and why it sleeps through the day. Stories and moments of play will let you experience the night-time adventures of the hare. Some of the tasks along the path you can only do if there is snow on the ground. The path is intended for children who are under 8 years of age and accompanied by an adult.

TRAIL

- The Winter Trail starts in front of Villa Elfvik and follows a 700-metre nature trail.
- The trail will lead you through the reeds on the shoreline to a gazebo, past a boat house and to a bird-watching tower. Then it will be time to walk by a pasture and through an old spruce copse back to a bird feeding station located outside Villa Elfvik.
- The stops are not marked in nature, but they are indicated on the map at the back of the notebook. The location of each stop is also described in the text.

NOTEBOOK

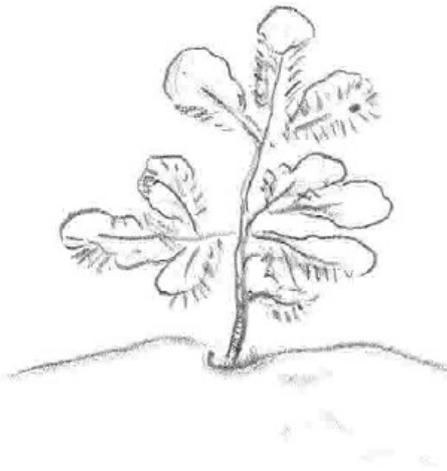
- The Winter Trail notebook contains a story and small games and tasks to accompany each stop of the trail.
- Feel free to do as many or as few tasks as you like and even come back another time to enjoy the tasks you choose not to do this time. You can also explore forests near your home with the help of these stories and tasks.
- Whenever you reach a stop, first read the story and then play or do the tasks.

Night-time hopper

Stop 1: Villa Elfvik's backyard, the beginning of the nature trail

White snow covered the forest and the cold was nipping the faces of a group of hikers. Night had already begun to fall. The animals living in the forest went back to their dens or looked for a place to sleep. They had to take cover from predators and the cold. The hikers turned back towards home, thinking of the fireplace and hot juice that would await them. The forest and its inhabitants would soon go to sleep. Or would they?

Sharp eyes can spot a moving snowdrift in the thickening darkness. What is it? Snowdrifts do not move, do they? The shape is getting closer – oh look, it is you! You are a mountain hare, a night-time hopper. You hop around in your beautiful white winter fur, looking for food. Your empty stomach is rumbling but you did not dare leave your hiding place before the night fell.



Mountain hares have not been seen around Villa Elfvik and the Laajalahti nature reserve since the turn of the millennium. European hares, also known as brown hares, are a frequent sight in the area. Have you seen a hare in Espoo? Where did you see it?

Tasks:

What would it be like to be a mountain hare? Would you dare to try how well you would do as a mountain hare in the wintery forest?

Turn from a human into a mountain hare:

1. Squat and try to hop like a mountain hare.
2. Stop! Watch and listen to your surroundings carefully. You must be vigilant to make sure that nothing dangerous can surprise you.
3. Learn how to warn others about dangers. Mountain hares warn of danger by thumping their back legs on the ground. Try it yourself!
4. Do you remember the story of Bambi? The rabbit in the story has been named after the way he drums the ground with his back legs. Do you remember his name?

Your description:

Weight: 2–6 kg, length: 50 cm, colour: brown in the summer, completely white in the winter, other distinguishing features: long ears, bobtail



It is now time to hop on to the next stop!

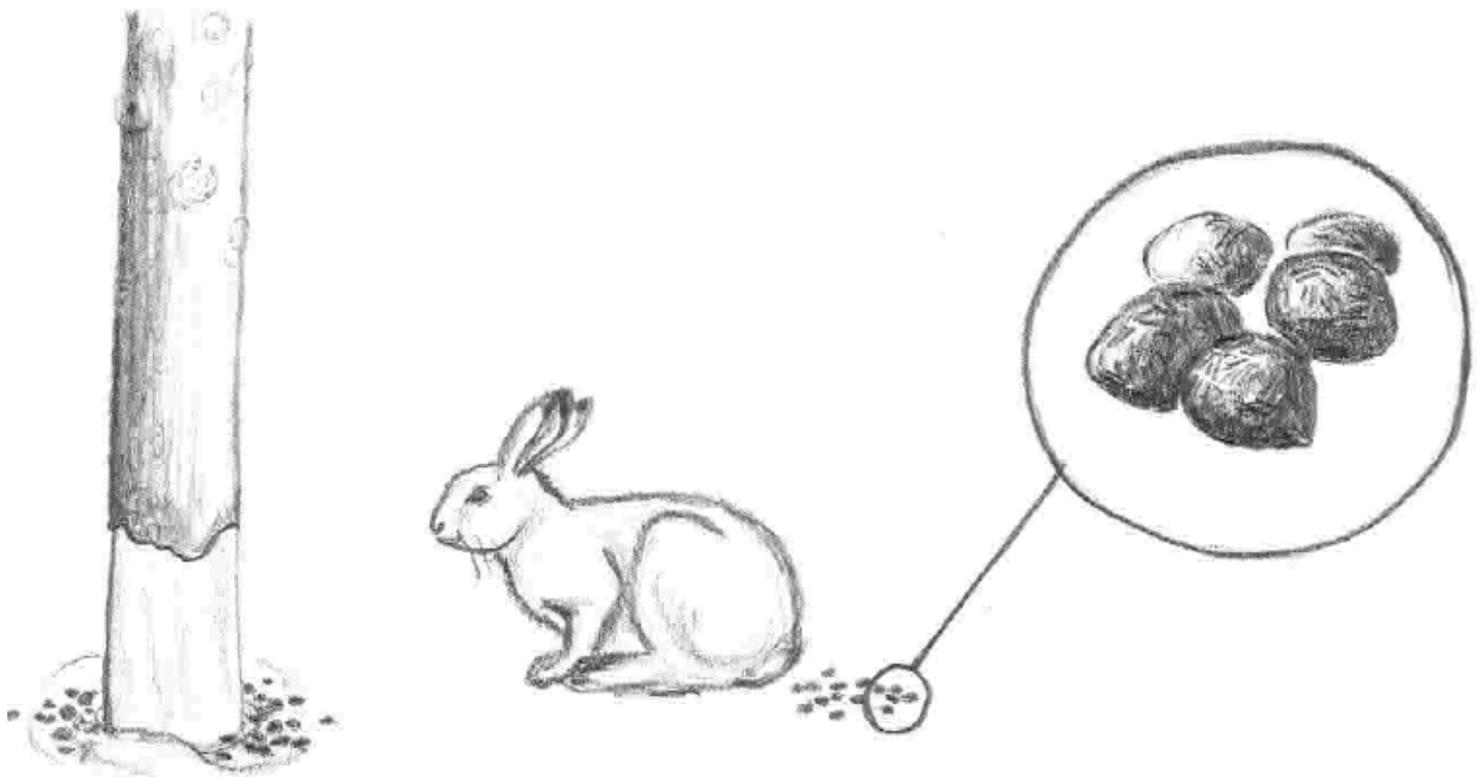
Yummy pellets!

Stop 2: Before the path enters the reeds

You circled around the spot where you slept through the day. As there was only little snow in the shade of the forest, you feasted on bilberry shrubs that had not been covered by the white stuff. Some might call your diet rather woody, as in the winter you eat shrubs, small twigs and bark.

While eating, you dropped a handsome amount of pellets on the snow. You produce quite a lot of them in a single night. You leave behind several hundred round, sawdust-like faecal pellets every night.

This may sound funny, but you eat your own pellets, although not the dry ones that resemble sawdust. Every now and then out comes a soft pellet that still contains a lot of nutrients. Those pellets you eat. Someone else might find this disgusting, but since you are a mountain hare, you think this is perfectly normal.



Tasks:

Can you find food to fill your rumbling tummy? Find foods that suit a mountain hare in your immediate surroundings.

In the winter, mountain hares eat shrubs and woody plants, small twigs and bark from trees. In the summer, they eat berries, grass, grains and buds.

A mountain hare`s winter menu:

A selection of frosty grasses

Aspen bark with a side of bilberry shrubs

Frozen lingonberries

Night-time sounds hand in hand:

To avoid getting eaten by a predator, you need to learn to listen to your environment. Follow the duckboards through the reeds. Keep your ears open!

You can follow the duckboards together or in pairs with a short distance between each pair. Your task is to walk as quietly as you can and listen to the sounds of wintery nature. Can you hear any other animals? Does the wind whisper in your ears?

After the duckboards, talk about the sounds you heard. Did anyone hear a fox skulking on the sea ice or on the shoreline?



Masterful deceiver

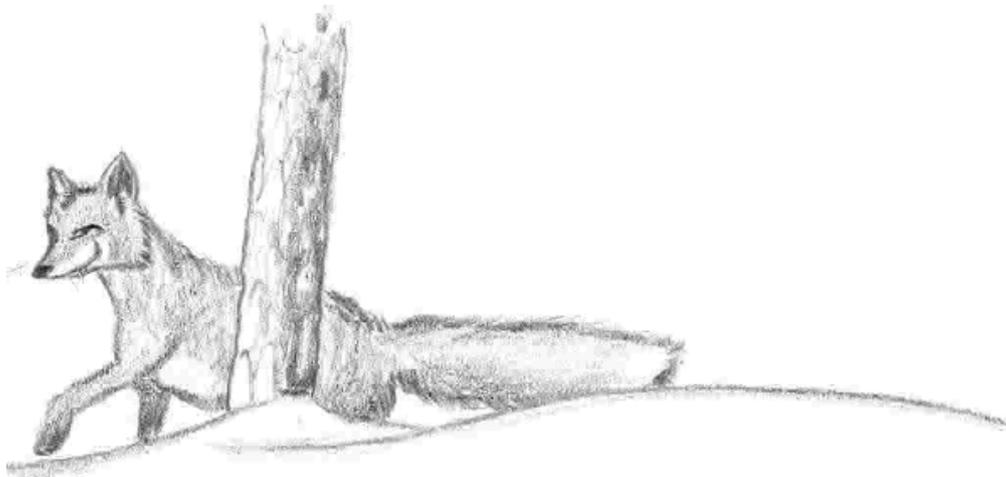
Stop 3: By the gazebo

The night had already gone on for hours. You never ceased to watch surroundings with your large eyes and ears. At night, predators were on the move. You had to be careful not to be caught and eaten by any of them. Your worst enemies are foxes, eagle-owls, lynxes and northern goshawks.

Suddenly you heard something. You immediately stopped eating and listened with your ears up, quiet as a mouse. What was that? All of a sudden you noticed something move in the dark forest. A fox! You bolted off and ran from the fox whose surprise attack had failed.

You ran as fast as your legs could carry you. And that was not slow at all. Then you halted, turned and followed your own trail back for a while. You took a giant leap to the side and continued in another direction entirely. The fox following you was flabbergasted when your trail came to a sudden end. He kept sniffing at your trail, while you, a masterful deceiver, were already far away.

You repeated the same trick for a few times and then sought shelter under the thick branches of a spruce. There you lay down, tired and panting.



Tasks:

Long jump training

How long a jump can you make?

Mark out a distance of about 4 metres on the ground and compare your jump to that.

Mother hare and baby hares

The mother hare (instructor) walks first. The baby hares, also known as leverets, follow in a queue (the children).

The mother hare is more careful than the small baby hares. She can see and hear approaching foxes better than the little ones. The mother hare (instructor) shouts: The fox is coming! All children should hide somewhere along the path as quickly as they can. The instructor also hides but keeps her back towards the children.

She waits for a moment (e.g. counts to ten) and then turns around to see if the baby hares have hidden well. The baby hares should hide so that the mother hare cannot see them when she turns around. When the mother hare shouts "the danger is over", the baby hares can return to the path. Do this again at another spot.



Mountain hare sports records:

Long jump: 4 metres

Running speed: 70 km/h

You always have your snowshoes on

Stop 4: In the forest behind the boat house

Fleeing from the fox drained your energy. Luckily your snowshoes came in handy when you ran. If you did not already know it, you have your very own snowshoes. You can spread the toes of your hind legs into large snowshoes. Thanks to them, you can make magnificent jumps in the deep snow. Guess where humans got the idea to make their own snowshoes?

You continued to look for food, leaving a trail of familiar-looking footprints. However, you were not the only one moving in the forest. The forest was full of animal footprints. The remains of an eaten spruce cone lay under a tree. Who do you think ate it? The tracks of a small cloven-hoofed animal also crossed the terrain. It had not been an elk, but a small group of European roe deer who had left imprints and brown pellets behind. Those with keen eyes could also spot a place where a bird had taken off and touched the snow with her wings. The wings had swept a beautiful pattern on the snow. Had the bird fled from something? The tracks in the snow evoke questions that only the inhabitants of the forest can answer.

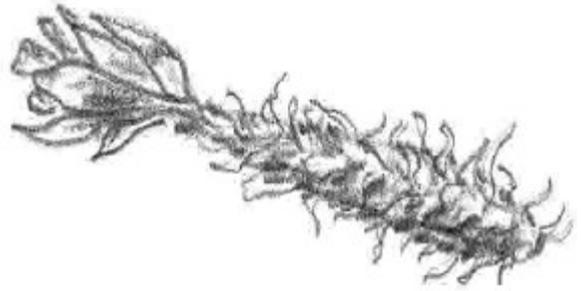
Tasks:

Looking for tracks

Can you decipher the tracks that cross the wintery forest floor? Look around to find animal tracks in the snow.

- Can you spot the tiny footprints of a mouse or a mole?
- Whose tracks end at the foot of a tree?
- Has a European hare or a mountain hare hopped here?
- Has the tail, the wings or the heavy belly of an animal left any markings in the snow?
- Some animals also leave their droppings on the snow. Can you find any?

Animal tracks in the snow:



Camouflage

Stop 5: After the pasture in the deep of the forest

Dawn was starting to break. The darkest hours of the night were past. You stopped to admire the dark blue sky. Beautiful snowflakes had started to drift down. You greeted them happily. They were as white as your fur.

You thought about the early winter. What a horrible time it had been! Your fur had already turned white but there had been no snow. You remembered how easily the fox had spotted you in the dark forest. He had nearly caught you almost every day! It had been difficult for you to find food because you had not dared to move in the forest.

What a happy day it had been when a proper snow storm had finally covered the forest in white. Finally, your camouflage had come in handy.

Now there was snow on the ground, and more was coming. Snowflakes, your best friends in winter. You started to dig a hole for yourself in the snow under some bushes. You had lived through another night, and now it was time to sleep. No one would notice you in the snow, and even the frost would not bother you under your snow cover.

Tasks:

Snowflake

One of the players is a speck of soot or dust around which a snowflake will form. She stands in the middle, hands on her hips.

Six other players form the starting points of the snowflake's six branches. They surround the person in the middle with everyone facing clockwise. Two of them grab each other's hands under the left arm of the middle player. A third player grabs the middle player's left elbow. The remaining three players do the same thing on the other side of the middle player.

There are now six branches that other players can continue. The branches can also divide to form smaller branches.

When the snowflake is ready it starts falling through the air. The human snowflake starts to revolve around its centre. The player in the middle starts turning slowly, and the players who form the branches follow the movement. The snowflake may even swirl around more wildly, in which case the players at the end of the branches will have to run. Some branches may even break off (when the players lose their grip), just like real snowflakes may break in windy conditions and heavy snowfall.

What kind of snowflakes can you find in nature?



Taking a nap

Stop 6: Outside Villa Elfvik by the bird feeding station

The animals who have slept through the night wake to a new day. After a frosty night, little birds in particular are very hungry, as are squirrels. You already went to sleep and did not notice the hustle and bustle at the bird feeding station nearby.

Blue tits, great tits, coal tits and greenfinches were busy feasting on sunflower seeds. It was not as easy for squirrels: they tried to climb to the feeding stand, but it was built to stop squirrels from reaching it. Squirrels were left with the seeds that the birds dropped on the ground. There were nonetheless plenty of them, so the squirrels were not left with empty stomachs. The hikers were also back, enjoying the winter day outdoors. The sun was shining. It was going to be a beautiful day!

No one noticed you, sleeping in your hole in the snow under the branches. You had to rest for the coming night, to be able to look for food and flee the fox, should you run into him again.

Tasks:

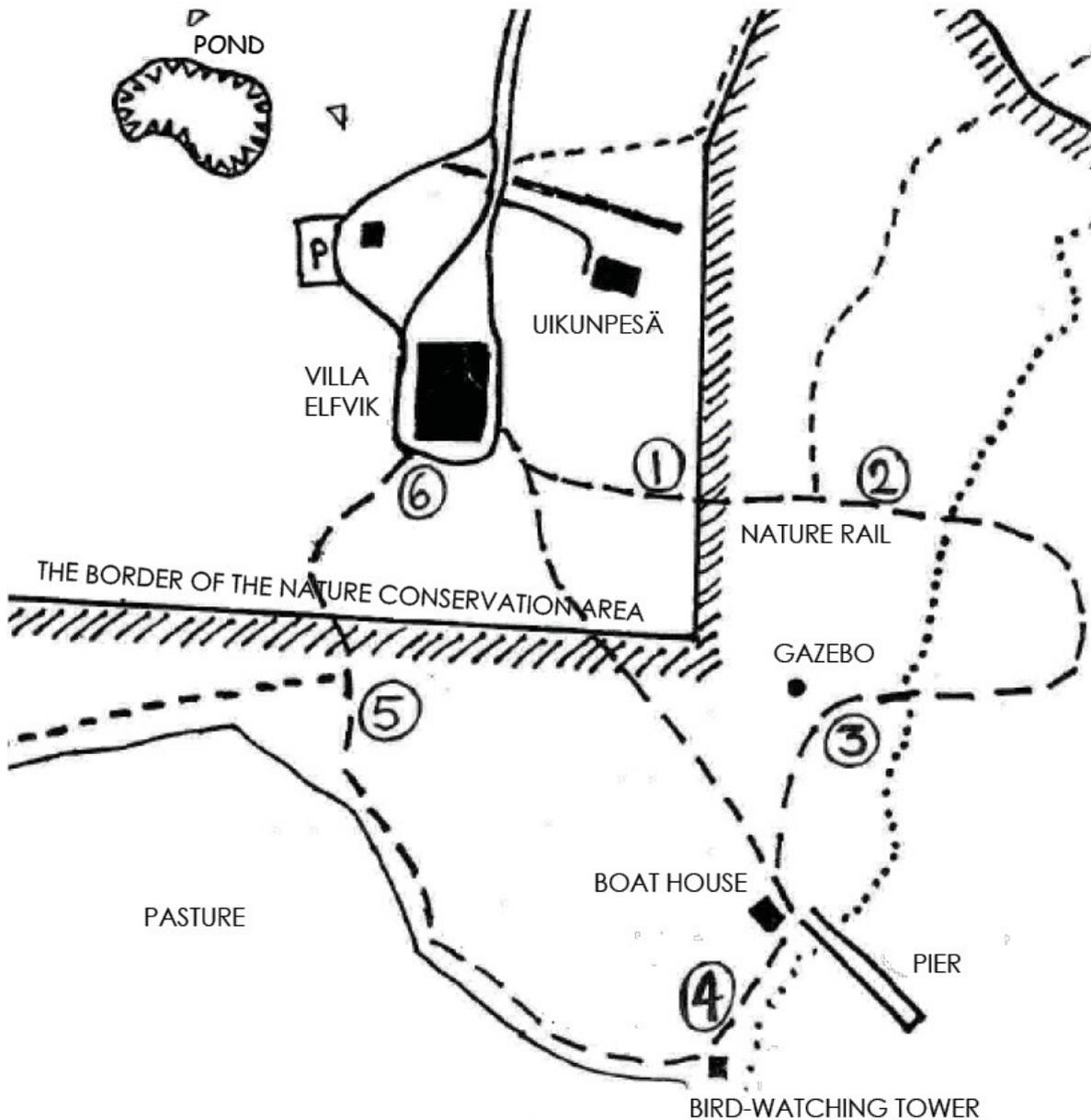
Observe the birds at the feeding station. Please do not go too close, as they might get scared and fly away.

- Can you count the birds at the feeding station?
- What are their colours?
- Can you name them?
- Do you see any squirrels? How many?

Many birds have been named after the way they look or behave. Can you come up with new names for the birds feasting at the feeding station?



Map



Some tasks along the Winter Path come from the following sources. These materials contain a lot of other ideas for things to do in the winter: Koskinen, Makkonen & Verkka, 2001. Talven taikaa. City of Helsinki Environment Centre.

(<http://www.hel2.fi/YMK/julkaisut/ymparistokasvatus/talventaikaa.pdf>)
Nature School Ilves' materials for school-age children ([luontokoulun ilvesmateriaali](#))



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