



# DECEMBER PHENOLOGY

*A reflective look at 2011*

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

*With new snow and ice, and maybe a surprise white frost,* December provides some of the year's most dramatic landscapes. Sunshine is at a minimum for the year, and the last week of the month dips in temperature. Listed below are a few observations from a year ago in the Twin Cities Metro area, Waconia and areas beyond when indicated. These events can be used to anticipate upcoming happenings and will help you compare 2012 with last year.

**December 1** \* A good share of the raccoons have retreated to their winter quarters. Pine Siskins are coming to some Nyjer™ feeders. At a feeding station along the Caribou Trail, near Lutsen, dozens of Pine Grosbeaks and Evening Grosbeaks gather.

**December 15** \* Only traces of snow remain in isolated patches across the landscape.

**December 16** \* Freeze-up date for Lake Minnetonka.

**December 17** \* On the Audubon Christmas Bird Count for the Willmar area, 29 people observe 50 species and 10,126 individual birds, including: 7,063 Canada Geese, 279 Black-capped Chickadees, 124 wild turkeys, 26 Northern Cardinals, and a single Sandhill Crane.

**December 19** \* Lakes are cracking, groaning, rumbling and thundering. This happens because once ice forms it expands when warmed and contracts when cooled.

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**House Finches, Mourning Doves and nuthatches are some of the visitors seeking a drink at heated birdbaths. Eurasian Collared Doves are extending their range and have been seen lately at feeding stations and around grain elevators in south, central and western Minnesota.**



**December 6** \* Today's high is only 19°F in the Twin Cities. It's the freeze-up date for Lake Waconia in Carver County, Cannon and Cedar Lakes at Faribault, Lake Como in St. Paul and Green Lake at Spicer.

**December 7** \* A little over 2" of snow covers the landscape. Fresh snow reflects close to 90% of the sun's radiation from its surface. The intensity of the sunlight is now just ¼th of the maximum level we had back in June.

**From Lutsen to Grand Marais flocks of both Bohemian and Cedar Waxwings are feeding on the bright red-orange fruit of the native American mountain ash.**



**December 25** \* It's a brown Christmas: no snow, or only traces, on most of Minnesota's landscape.

**December 26** \* A record high of 52°F (normal is 25°F) at MSP International Airport causes water to pool on top of lake ice. People are enjoying outdoor activities, like flying kites, running (with bare legs!), and bicycling.

**December 29** \* With no snow on the landscape, ice boating on Lake Minnetonka and other lakes has been excellent lately. It's a splendid time of year, with long shadows in the woods.

**December 31** \* With a high of 43°F in the Twin Cities, this December ended up the tenth warmest on record.

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**Screech Owls roost in Wood Duck houses now. Gray Squirrels and other animals are also using these nesting boxes for winter shelter. Smaller birds, such as chickadees, nuthatches and juncos, roost in winterized bluebird-sized boxes with vents plugged and an inch of dry grass or broken-up leaves on the bottom.**

