



ALL SEASONS
WILD BIRD
STORE

DECEMBER PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2013

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

With new snow and ice, and maybe a surprise white frost, December can provide some of the year's most dramatic landscapes. Sunshine is at a minimum for the year, and the coldest part of the month is usually the last week. 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 2014 with last year.

December 1 * Welcome to the first day of meteorological winter. The lake ice is thickening but remember, four inches of new solid ice is required for safe walking, skating and ice fishing. A minimum of 8 to 12 inches of ice is necessary to drive a car on a lake.

December 15 * Today's Cedar Creek Bog (just north of the Twin Cities) Christmas Bird Count records 41 species, including 21 Red-headed Woodpeckers. The count also includes a good number of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings.

DEC.

3

All across the state, birds are abundant and active at feeders during the snowfall. Close to 50 wintering Mourning Doves visit various feeding stations in Le Sueur. Today is the freeze-up date for Roosevelt Lake at Outing.



December 16 * A thousand or so American Crows gather before sunset to roost on the edge of downtown Minneapolis. In one Shakopee yard, five Eastern Bluebirds roost together in a single bluebird nesting box, then come to the feeding station for mealworms.

December 21 * On this first day of astronomical winter—the winter solstice—we receive only 25 percent of the solar intensity we had on June 21, and experience the longest shadows.

December 4 * A winter storm that started yesterday brings 4 to 8 inches of snow in the Twin Cities, 9 inches in Marshall, and a surprising 33 inches near Two Harbors. Two feet of snow falls in Duluth, where surfers enjoy Lake Superior's 6 to 8 foot waves.

December 22 * While most ice on Lake Waconia is up to 15 inches thick, in some places it's only about 7 inches thick. Pairs of Great Horned Owls hoot duets, probably establishing nesting territories or at least keeping in touch.

December 5 * Wave after wave of Canada Geese fly over the Fairmont area, headed south.

December 24 * Forty years of statistics tell us that there's a 92 percent chance of a white Christmas, with an inch or more of snow, if you live in International Falls. In the Twin Cities, the odds are 72 percent. The snow depth at MSP Int'l Airport today is 7.1 inches; 23 inches covers the land at Grand Marais.

December 6 * Today is the freeze-up date for both Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet in Minneapolis. Screech Owls, gray squirrels and other animals borrow wood duck houses for winter shelter.

December 14 * 52 Northern Cardinals converge on a single feeding station on the edge of Northfield. During the annual Faribault area Christmas Bird Count, 40 observers tally 55 species including: 1 Snowy Owl, 2 Great Blue Herons, and over 200 American Robins. The Excelsior Christmas Bird Count was started in 1951, and this year 54 birders observed 58 species including: 2,570 Mallard Ducks, 714 Black-capped Chickadees, 3 Belted Kingfishers and 1 Long-eared Owl.

DEC.

28

The Twin Cities register a new record high of 47°F. Honey bees are out on cleansing flights.

December 29 * With a temperature of -43°F in Embarrass this morning, a new state record low is set for the year.

