



# FEBRUARY PHENOLOGY

*A reflective look at 2011*

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

*February is normally the most pleasant month of winter:* the season of frozen beauty and survival. The first half of the month usually remains cold and cloudy, but warmer temperatures and sunshine often appear mid-month and continue into March. Listed below are a few observations from a year ago in the Twin Cities Metro area, Waconia and areas beyond when indicated.

**Feb. 1** \* Coyote mating season begins.

**Feb. 4** \* Today's high is 34°F, the first day above freezing since December 30. Northern Cardinals sing "what-cheer, cheer, cheer" over the 18" snow pack.

**Feb. 6** \* The ice thickness on Lake Waconia is 24 to 30". Northern flying squirrels come each night to a Lutsen-area feeder for peanut butter and sunflower seeds. Tip: Place a penny or two in a heated birdbath to keep algae at bay.



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**American Goldfinches begin to display some new bright yellow feathers—another subtle sign of spring.**

**Feb. 11** \* Today a Blue Jay sings the first spring "pump handle" call. At our latitude, this date is traditionally when greenhouse owners once again notice that plants come out of dormancy and start growing.

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**Today is the first 40°F or above day of the year. MSP International Airport reaches a high of 48°F. House Finches sing their first spring song.**



**Feb. 15** \* Today the first striped skunk slinks out of its winter den.

**Feb. 16** \* Today is the first 50°F temperature reading of the year. The first Homed Larks appear. Circles of snow-free ground appear around most tree trunks.

**Feb. 17** \* About 20 minutes before sunrise, Northern Cardinals, Dark-eyed Juncos and American Tree Sparrows are busy at feeding stations. The mating season for gray squirrels begins. A few Bald Eagles already incubate eggs in southern parts of the state.

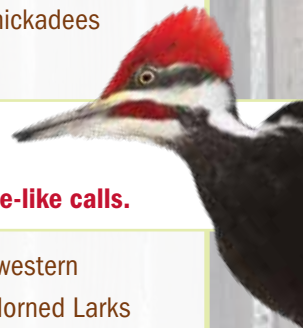
**Feb. 19** \* Wild tom Turkeys start gobbling and fanning their tails. Northern Cardinals feed in pair bonds. About 30 Ring-necked Pheasants visit a Faribault feeding station to feast on whole and cracked corn.

**Feb. 21** \* It's a winter wonderland! The biggest snowfall on record for the Twin Cities heaps 13.8" of snow on the Airport, and 19" on Eden Prairie. Dark-eyed Juncos, American Goldfinches, and Black-capped Chickadees swarm feeders.

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**As nesting season approaches, Pileated Woodpeckers frequently make drumming sounds and cackle-like calls.**



**Feb. 25** \* Around this date in southern and western Minnesota, look for small flocks of 3 to 20 Horned Larks along rural roadsides. They are among the first early bird migrants.

**Feb. 28** \* We end the month, and meteorological winter, with a high temperature of 25°F and 21" of snow on the landscape. A male Varied Thrush, a winter visitant from the Pacific Northwest, visits a Victoria-area feeding station.