



FEBRUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2012

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. These events can be used to anticipate upcoming happenings and will help you compare 2013 with last year.

February 1 * Only about 10 percent of the landscape is snow covered. House Finches sing their first spring songs. The first Horned Larks arrive in extreme southern MN; they're one of the very early migrants.

February 2 * A striped skunk emerges from hibernation. With temperature highs in the 40s in southern MN, honeybees set out on cleansing flights.

February 4 * A white frost beautifully tints trees and shrubs this morning. A raccoon is out and about for the first time this season.

February 15 * About 50 wintering American Robins flock in crab apple trees at the U of MN Landscape Arboretum.

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Today is sunny with a high of 43°F. Northern Cardinals sing loud and long. The first eastern chipmunk is out and about.



February 18 * Bald Eagles begin laying eggs. Aurorae borealis dance in northern Minnesota skies.

February 22 * As of today we've gained 2 hours of daylight since December 21.

February 23 * A male Mourning Dove coos for the first time this season. About 2 inches of snow covers the landscape, for a total of just 18 inches of snow this season (in 2011 on this date, 21 inches covered the landscape and 75 inches had fallen for the season).

February 25 * Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins are numerous at Lutsen area feeding stations.

February 26 * Great Horned Owls nest. European Starlings sport yellow bills now as spring approaches. Gray, red, fox and flying squirrels continue their mating season. Striped skunks and raccoons move about searching for food and companionship.

February 29 * This leap day, the Twin Cities finishes the month with about 4 inches of new wet snow, and a monthly average temperature of 27.7°F (6.7°F warmer than average). Juncos, cardinals, chickadees, and other birds feast hungrily at feeding stations.

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Bald Eagles hunt along the Mississippi River on the south side of the Twin Cities. Two Great Blue Herons and a Belted Kingfisher are also in the area. Our snow drought drags on, as does the mild winter.

February 11 * Greenhouse plants emerge from dormancy and start to grow. The sun's higher position in the sky means interiors of greenhouses—and even of our cars and trucks—now warm up in the sunlight, even on cold days.

February 12 * Sandhill Cranes are at Lake Rebecca Park, near Delano. This is more than a month earlier than their typical arrival date. A wintering Belted Kingfisher hunts along a creek near Lamberton, MN.

February 14 * Across Minnesota we're in moderate to severe drought. Some male American Goldfinches are showing a few bright yellow feathers. About two-dozen Mourning Doves come to a feeding station in Minnetonka. A pair of Common Ravens build a nest near Beaver Bay. Migrating Eastern Bluebirds return to Kenyon, near Faribault, MN.

