



FEBRUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2013

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

The season of frozen beauty and survival, February is the most pleasant month of winter. The first half of the month usually remains cold and cloudy, but warmer temperatures and sunshine often appear mid-month and continue on 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 2014 with last year.

February 1 * The month starts out cold: -13°F at MSP International Airport, marking the coldest in two years. In Waconia, the flicker-like spring call of the Red-bellied Woodpecker cuts through the frigid air, and in early afternoon there's a feeding frenzy at my backyard feeding station. Numerous birds let us know that snow is on the way, and sure enough, snow comes in the late afternoon.

FEB.

2

The wonderful whistled "what-cheer!" songs of the Northern Cardinal make us take note. Red foxes are normally solitary but now as their mating season approaches they travel in pairs.



February 3 * Bald Eagle nesting season begins in February, and already pairs return to their southern Minnesota nesting sites.

February 6 * Results of an annual DNR aerial survey, conducted in January and released today, tell us the Minnesota moose population is down a little over one-third in one year. Now in 2013 just 2,760 are counted; in 2012 the moose population was 4,200.

February 9 * Thirty Ring-necked Pheasants and over 100 Pine Siskins visit a single backyard feeding station in Faribault.

February 10 * First House Finches sing their warbling musical spring songs. American Goldfinches display splotches of new yellow feathers.

February 15 * A pair of Barred Owls perform their hooting duet. This is an "invasion year" for Common Redpolls; they flock at feeding stations in northern and southern Minnesota.

FEB.

17

Horned Larks arrive. In southern and western Minnesota, look for small flocks of 3 to 10 (even up to 30) Horned Larks along rural roadsides. They are among the first early bird migrants.



February 18 * American Tree Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins join the usual Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Northern Cardinals and various woodpeckers at feeding stations. Heated birdbaths attract much attention.

February 20 * A few European Starlings are showing yellow beaks. Their bills change from black to yellow for the upcoming nesting season.

February 21 * Good numbers of Great Gray Owls move into northeast Minnesota, with many sightings along the North Shore between Duluth and Two Harbors.

February 22 * Over 5 inches of snow falls, the biggest snowfall of the month. The loud double squawk of a courting male Ring-necked Pheasant bursts through the otherwise quiet snow-covered land.

FEB.

24

As the nesting season approaches, the drumming and cackle-calling of the Pileated Woodpecker booms through forested regions and river corridors.

February 25 * First wintering-over male Mourning Doves coo to signify the start of mating season.

February 28 * We end the month of February, and meteorological winter, with a high temperature of 31°F, 6 inches of snow on the landscape and a sunset at 6 p.m.

