



FEBRUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2014

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

February is normally the most pleasant month of winter, a month 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 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 2015 with last year.

February 1 * We've gained 1 hour and 2 minutes of daylight since the winter solstice on Dec. 21. So far this season the Twin Cities have received 38.6" of snow (about 4" above normal). A flock of over 200 Snow Buntings turns up just west of Northfield.



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About 350 Mallard Ducks are on an open area of the Cannon River in Northfield.

February 4 * Several thousand American Crows roost each night on the west side of downtown Minneapolis.

February 7 * As of today, 93.5% of Lake Superior's surface is frozen—about three times the average for this time of year.

February 8 * Bills of European Starlings begin turning yellow for spring. A few American Goldfinches sport some new bright yellow feathers on their necks and heads, predicting spring.

February 9 * It's the 15th straight day with a subzero temperature reading and our 40th subzero low for the winter in the Twin Cities.

February 10 * It's clear and -14°F at 9 am when I hear Black-capped Chickadees singing their whistled "fee-bee" spring songs over and over along the shore of Lake Waconia.

February 11 * Due to the Sun's higher position in the sky, from this date on it will be hot and humid in greenhouses on sunny days. Greenhouse plants start coming out of dormancy.

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Wintering American Robins come to heated birdbaths to sip water. They like raisins and mealworms at feeders.



February 15 * Skiers and snowboarders report the best conditions ever at Lutsen Mountains, where falling snow brings their season total to almost 8'. The mating season begins for red foxes and flying, fox, gray and red squirrels.

February 16 * About 200 birders from 26 states (and one from the UK) attend the 7th annual Sax-Zim Bog Winter Birding Festival in NE Minnesota. They observe Ruffed and Sharp-tailed Grouse, Boreal Chickadees, both Pine and Evening grosbeaks, and four owl species: Snowy, Great Gray, Hawk, and Great Horned.

February 17 * Deer start to shed winter fur. Wild Turkeys gobble loud and often. Migrant Horned Larks gather in small flocks along southern MN roadsides. American Crows return to the Thief River Falls area of NW Minnesota; they're spring migrants.

February 18 * We hit 40°F for the second time this year. A high of 44°F is the warmest in 37 days for the Twin Cities.

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Songbirds flock to feeding stations during the snowfall today. Cedar Waxwings and American Robins feed on crabapple fruit.



February 21 * Many schools close as 10" of new snow falls on the Twin Cities from yesterday into today. We now have 24" of snow—the most since 1982—and have received 56" for the season.

February 22 * A first eastern chipmunk out and about.

February 23 * Five wintering Eastern Bluebirds eat wild fruit and come to a mealworm feeder in a Shakopee yard; all five roost in a single bluebird nestbox each night.

February 25 * Bald Eagles in southern MN begin laying eggs.

February 27 * A steady stream of White-breasted Nuthatches, Blue Jays, Northern Cardinals, various woodpeckers and more come to feeding stations.

February 28 * 9.7°F, the avg. temperature for Dec. through Feb. in the Twin Cities, qualifies for 9th place as coldest winter on record, and is the coldest winter since 1979.

