



JANUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2011

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

January averages show it's the coldest month of the year here in Minnesota. But as winter marches on, careful observers may spy signs of nature's slow transformation back to spring. 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 this year with last.

Jan. 1 * A foot of snow covers the landscape on this New Year's Day, with a high of only 9°F and bitter cold winds. Intricate frost patterns paint windowpanes and blazingly bright sundogs punctuate the sunny afternoon skies. Lake ice audibly cracks and thunders as it contracts with the cold temperatures. Sixteen species of birds visit one Northfield feeding station, including 32 Mourning Doves, 30 Northern Cardinals and a single Northern Flicker.

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At 8 am, White-breasted Nuthatches sing their spring songs of "whi, whi, whi" or "who, who, who" over and over. Wintering American Robins feed on hackberry tree fruit and drink from a heated birdbath.



Jan. 6 * Black-capped Chickadees whistle a "fee-bee" song, lifting the spirits of those who hear this early sign of spring.

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Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls visit Lutsen-area feeding stations. Lake Superior is wide open with elegant ice formations developing where waves spray the rocky shores.



Jan. 12 * Northern Cardinals sing their spring territorial song, "what-cheer, cheer, cheer."

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A male Ring-necked Pheasant crows his loud double squawk—the first of its sound this year.



Jan. 14 * Meteorological winter, which started on December 1, is now half over. We've already gained about 20 minutes of daylight since the December solstice. Great Horned Owls declare nesting territories by hooting duets.

Jan. 16 * Observers spot a Snowy Owl near Northfield. Eurasian Collared Doves, introduced to the Bahamas from Asia in 1975, continue to extend their range and pass through southern Minnesota towns, even visiting some feeders.

Jan. 18 * Downy Woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches and juncos take up temporary residence in bluebird boxes winterized for roosting.

Jan. 25 * American Crows exhibit a spectacular winter roosting behavior in huge flocks of sometimes hundreds or even more than a thousand, called *communal roosting*.

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Wintering American Robins feed on crabapples and other fruit, and sometimes come to tray feeders offering suet mixes, raisins, bread, and slices of fruit.



Jan. 31 * The month ends with 17" of snow in January and 60.4" for the season so far.