



JANUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2014

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

January averages out as the coldest month of the year here in Minnesota, and yet if a person is observant, signs of spring can be noticed. Yes, one season slides slowly into another. 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.

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The first large sheets of ice on Lake Superior appear along the North Shore; this normally doesn't happen until late February. On this New Year's Day, the low is -8°F and 9" of snow covers the landscape.



January 2 * A Downy Woodpecker drums its territory; a subtle spring sign. About 28-36" of snow covers Lutsen Mountains. The -46°F temperature at Embarrass is the nation's coldest.

January 3 * I hear my first-of-the-year "fee-bee" song whistled by a Black-capped Chickadee; an early spring sign.

January 5 * A Victoria observer reports the first Blue Jay "pump-handle" call (also known as the "speelunker" call).

January 6 * A brutal blast of cold air keeps tow trucks busy, all Minnesota K-12 public schools close and birds flock to feeding stations. The -23°F recorded at MSP Int'l Airport is the coldest in a decade. The low of -40°F at Embarrass is the nation's low.

January 7 * The wicked cold continues, resulting in many Minnesota and Wisconsin school closings. Still, I hear the "whi, whi, whi ..." spring call of the White-breasted Nuthatch this morning.

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The temperature rises to 20°F and the first Northern Cardinal sings a full "what-cheer-cheer..." song.



January 11 * Three wintering Yellow-rumped Warblers visit a stand of junipers in St. Croix Valley to dine on berries. Two birders count 126 Wild Turkeys in a spot just west of Thief River Falls. About 100,000 Wild Turkeys live in Minnesota.

January 12 * A January thaw, with the first 40°F temperature of the year, brings out raccoons—evidenced by fresh tracks in the snow.

January 15 * Today's the midpoint of meteorological winter. On average, the 90 coldest days of the year come between Dec. 1st and Feb. 28th. About 2,000 Trumpeter Swans winter on the Mississippi River at Monticello. They may also be seen in open water areas at Hudson and Reads Landing.

January 16 * High of 35°F. The scent of a skunk wafts into the air for the first time this season.

January 19 * High of 39°F. 11" of snow covers the Twin Cities. Wintering American Robins flock in numbers of 20 to 100 birds. Apple growers begin pruning their trees.

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Great Horned Owls hoot duets as pairs declare their nesting territories. Both Pine and Evening Grosbeaks come to feeders in the Lutsen area.



January 23 * Most Twin Cities area lakes are covered with about 2' of ice. Dark-eyed Juncos and American Goldfinches are plentiful at feeding stations.

January 26 * The first Wild Turkeys are gobbling.

January 27 * Another Arctic blast. Hundreds of schools close. In the Twin Cities, the low is -16°F and the high is only -6°F; it's even colder out of the cities.

January 28 * Many Minnesota schools close for the fifth day this month. -35°F in Longville, MN is the low in the nation.

January 29 * It's egg-laying time for Great Horned Owls. They are the earliest birds to hatch young in the state.

January 30 * Nine people report sightings of Snowy Owls in the New London, Spicer and Willmar area.

January 31 * We in the Twin Cities and surrounding area just experienced the coldest January in 20 years! A flock of about 20 Horned Larks show up 3 miles south of Faribault; they are considered to be our first spring migrants each year.