



MARCH PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2014

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

March is a transition time when cold meets warm and spring moves in. Snow is likely, but by the end of the month storms typically bring more rain than snow. Listed below are a few observations from a year ago in the Minneapolis/St. Paul and Waconia area, and beyond when indicated. These events can be used to anticipate upcoming spring occurrences and will help compare this year with last.

March 1 * March comes in like a lion. Two feet of snow covers the landscape. It's blustery and overcast, and for the 48th day this winter we have a low temperature that's below zero.

March 2 * It's -15°F this morning, but sunny with calmer winds and a lot of spring bird music, including Northern Cardinals and Black-capped Chickadees singing their whistled songs and Downy Woodpeckers drumming. The nation's low is -44°F at Embarrass, MN.

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More European Starlings display yellow bills as the nesting season approaches. Meanwhile, some Bald Eagles are incubating eggs.



March 9 * A first male Mourning Dove is cooing. A flock of House Finches is very vocal.

March 10 * We reach 50°F for the first time this year. Snow depth is down to 16 inches. A first courting male Ring-necked Pheasant makes a loud double squawk.

March 13 * Canada Geese fly overhead, honking; they're probably the first migrants.

March 18 * The first Red-winged Blackbirds return to Faribault. They sing their trilling songs on territories in marshlands.

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The first migrating American Robins arrive; they're noisy and flighty. The 40-year average for return of the first robins is March 11. The snow depth is down to 9 inches.



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The first Sandhill Cranes, Eastern Bluebird and Great Blue Heron return to the Faribault area. Male Wild Turkeys are gobbling and fanning their tails. Today is the first good maple sap run.



March 21 * The first Common Grackles return. Pairs of Canada Geese stand on the ice in wetland nesting territories. A birding group spies 14 species of migrating waterfowl in LeSueur County. They also observe Osprey, Killdeer and Eastern Phoebes.

March 28 * The snow depth is down to 2 inches. The first Wood Duck arrives.

March 30 * Today is the first 60°F day. Maple syrup producers report very good sap runs. Killdeers are calling, Red-wing Blackbirds are trilling and American Robins are singing. At Duluth, hundreds of Bald Eagles migrate overhead.

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We notice a build-up in the numbers of Dark-eyed Juncos coming to feeding stations. Old snowdrifts, patches and piles of snow are all that's left in the landscape. Common snowdrops, the first of the garden flowers to open each spring, begin blooming.

