



NOVEMBER PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2011

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

November starts out like autumn, but ends up wintery. Dried grasses and herbs tower in fields, waterfowl migrate, and lakes turn to ice. It's a month of clouds, resulting in some of the best sunrises and sunsets of the year. 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 2012 with last year.

November 2 * Norway maples are golden-yellow and both pin and white oaks display reds and rich browns.

NOV.

3



Today's high is 54°F. Last-of-the-season painted turtles are sunning up on logs in ponds. Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) reports a count of 6,190 Sandhill Cranes.

November 7 * Flocks of Tundra Swans fly over the Twin Cities. They're coming from their summer range, mainly north of the Arctic Circle, to pause in numbers at such places as the Weaver marshes and backwaters of the Mississippi River just south of Brownsville before leaving for their winter headquarters.

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8

Brilliant red foliage glows from hedges of burning bush and vines of Boston ivy. Juncos and American Tree Sparrows come to feeding stations. Black-capped Chickadees gather in winter flocks. Some Eastern Bluebirds remain.



November 10 * First snow flurries. Minnesota's total soybean, corn and sugar beet production is a bit down from last year because of a wet spring, late planting and dry weather conditions beginning in July.

November 12 * Big flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles gather in southern Minnesota.

November 13 * The number of American Coots on southern Minnesota lakes dwindles as they migrate south. A few Eastern Chipmunks are still gathering food above

ground but most are beginning to hibernate in their underground burrows.

November 16 * First ice on ponds. Heated birdbaths and bubbling fountains attract scores of birds and other wildlife.

NOV.

17

It's the first day we don't go above freezing. Geraniums, alyssum and petunias perish. Over 7,000 Sandhill Cranes had rested at Sherburne NWR yesterday on their way south, and today only about 800 remain. A few Snowy Owls appear in northern Minnesota.



November 18 * Last flocks of Franklin's Gulls come back to Lake Waconia at sunset.

November 19 * First snowfall. About 2" to 4" falls in the Twin Cities area, 6" at St. Cloud and 11" at Sartell. Birds are active at feeding stations.

November 24 * On this warm (high of 59°F) Thanksgiving Day, golf courses are open, runners wear shorts and T-shirts and many people put up outdoor Christmas decorations.

November 26 * About 40% of Minnesota is in moderate to severe drought. Common Redpolls appear in Lutsen.

November 30 * American Robins and Cedar Waxwings feast on crabapples. For the Twin Cities, it's the tenth warmest November on record. Today marks the end of meteorological fall, which was officially the driest autumn with a total of 1.33" of precipitation. Water levels are way down in local lakes, wetlands and rivers.



DECEMBER PHENOLOGY

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by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

With new snow and ice, and maybe a surprise white frost, December provides some of the year's most dramatic landscapes. Sunshine is at a minimum for the year, and the last week of the month dips in temperature. 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 2012 with last year.

December 1 * A good share of the raccoons have retreated to their winter quarters. Pine Siskins are coming to some Nyjer™ feeders. At a feeding station along the Caribou Trail, near Lutsen, dozens of Pine Grosbeaks and Evening Grosbeaks gather.

December 15 * Only traces of snow remain in isolated patches across the landscape.

December 16 * Freeze-up date for Lake Minnetonka.

December 17 * On the Audubon Christmas Bird Count for the Willmar area, 29 people observe 50 species and 10,126 individual birds, including: 7,063 Canada Geese, 279 Black-capped Chickadees, 124 wild turkeys, 26 Northern Cardinals, and a single Sandhill Crane.

December 19 * Lakes are cracking, groaning, rumbling and thundering. This happens because once ice forms it expands when warmed and contracts when cooled.

DEC.

4

House Finches, Mourning Doves and nuthatches are some of the visitors seeking a drink at heated birdbaths. Eurasian Collared Doves are extending their range and have been seen lately at feeding stations and around grain elevators in south, central and western Minnesota.



December 6 * Today's high is only 19°F in the Twin Cities. It's the freeze-up date for Lake Waconia in Carver County, Cannon and Cedar Lakes at Faribault, Lake Como in St. Paul and Green Lake at Spicer.

December 7 * A little over 2" of snow covers the landscape. Fresh snow reflects close to 90% of the sun's radiation from its surface. The intensity of the sunlight is now just ¼th of the maximum level we had back in June.

From Lutsen to Grand Marais flocks of both Bohemian and Cedar Waxwings are feeding on the bright red-orange fruit of the native American mountain ash.



December 25 * It's a brown Christmas: no snow, or only traces, on most of Minnesota's landscape.

December 26 * A record high of 52°F (normal is 25°F) at MSP International Airport causes water to pool on top of lake ice. People are enjoying outdoor activities, like flying kites, running (with bare legs!), and bicycling.

December 29 * With no snow on the landscape, ice boating on Lake Minnetonka and other lakes has been excellent lately. It's a splendid time of year, with long shadows in the woods.

December 31 * With a high of 43°F in the Twin Cities, this December ended up the tenth warmest on record.

DEC.

10

Screech Owls roost in Wood Duck houses now. Gray Squirrels and other animals are also using these nesting boxes for winter shelter. Smaller birds, such as chickadees, nuthatches and juncos, roost in winterized bluebird-sized boxes with vents plugged and an inch of dry grass or broken-up leaves on the bottom.

