

January Phenology

a reflective look at 2008 *Jim Gilbert*



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.

- 1 A Black-capped Chickadee was heard singing its clear whistle “fee-bee” spring song. About 7” of snow covers the landscape.
- 3 A White-breasted Nuthatch was heard singing the “whi, whi, whi,...” or “who, who, who,...” spring song over-and-over.
- 4 About 21” of snow covers Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, located near Finland. Common Ravens have started aerial displays which are part of their pairing behavior.
- 5 High temperature of 34 degrees F. Smelled first skunk.
- 6 High of 41 degrees F (normal is 22 degrees). Snowfleas “danced” on snow cover. About two dozen Common Goldeneyes joined a few Mallards and Canada geese in open water below Coon Rapids Dam.
- 7 High of 37 degrees F. First raccoons out and about. At a Chisago City area feeding station, Dark-eyed Juncos are the most numerous of the birds, with cardinals and Mourning Doves next.
- 9 We first heard the “flicker-like” spring call of the Red-bellied Woodpecker.
- 10 First snowfall this January. About 1.5.”
- 12 This morning the first cardinal was reported singing the “what-cheer, cheer, cheer,...” territorial song. Three

male Eastern Bluebirds drank water at a heated birdbath in Andover. Boreal Chickadee seen at Lutsen.

- 13 We have gained 20 minutes of daylight since the winter solstice on December 22. Great Horned Owl pairs are duet hooting as they set up nesting territories.
- 14 At Lutsen, 22” of lake effect snow fell in three days.
- 15 Some European Starlings have begun showing yellow on their bills; an early spring sign.
- 19 Ring-necked Pheasants and Wild Turkeys can be seen in crabapple trees feeding on the fruit. Arctic blast today. All day the temperature stayed below zero over 95% of Minnesota.
- 24 Minus 39 degrees F was recorded at Embarrass this morning. Minnesota snow cover ranges from 24” or more in parts of the northeast to less than 8” over most of the south.
- 25 At a Lutsen feeding station, Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins and Gray Jays come during the day, and 7 Flying Squirrels and a Gray Fox come in the evening.
- 26 First woodpeckers heard drumming.
- 27 First time in 18 days we went above freezing. Another January thaw; high of 37 degrees F. A flock of over 100 snow buntings was seen at Sherburne Refuge.
- 28 High of 43 degrees (normal high would be 23 degrees F). Honey bees out on cleansing flights.
- 31 House Finches in full song; the first time they were heard singing this year. About 5” of snow covers the landscape. High temperature of 14 degrees under mostly sunny skies.



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February Phenology

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February is normally the most pleasant month of winter, the season of frozen beauty and survival. The first half of the month usually remains cold and cloudy but warmer temperatures and sunshine often appear in mid-month and continue on into March.

- 2 Both White- and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Dark-eyed Juncos, American Tree Sparrows and a flock of Common Redpolls are some of the visitors at the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum feeding station.
- 5 White-breasted Nuthatches and Black-capped Chickadees sing their spring songs as one season slides slowly into the next. About 6" of snow covers the landscape.
- 8 Downy Woodpeckers are heard drumming on resonant tree branches and other "signal posts." They do this to announce territories and establish pair bonds. Animals that drink out of a heated birdbath at Lutsen include Gray Jays, Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Gray Fox and deer.
- 10 Very cold day: High of only -5 degrees F. Bright sundogs are visible. Birdfeeder birds come in a steady stream.
- 11 Partly sunny and high temperature of +5 degrees F. This is the date when greenhouse plants began to come out of dormancy. This happens because of the Sun's higher position in the sky. From this date on, it will be warm and humid in greenhouses on sunny days.
- 16 First day above freezing this February. High of 35 degrees. First Woodchuck emerged.

- 19 Minus 8 degrees at Twin Cities Airport this morning. Our 22nd day below zero this winter.
- 20 First Horned Larks spotted (they are one of the earliest returning migrants). Motorists in the southern half of Minnesota began to see flocks of this small tan-to-brown lark along roadsides and in fields.
- 21 First Eastern Chipmunk appears.
- 23 Great Horned Owl on nest in Brooklyn Park. Bald Eagle pairs are working on their nests. Ice on Lake Waconia is 30 to 34 inches thick.
- 24 Black-capped Chickadees investigated a nest box in a Victoria yard. In Polk County (NW Minnesota), the first Horned Larks are back, Snow Buntings and Common Redpolls can be seen in large flocks, and Sharp-tailed Grouse are starting to display.
- 27 At Colville Park in Red Wing, 21 bald eagles and 5 Golden Eagles are spotted. This is a great spot for a Sunday drive to see birds.
- 28 An early sighting of a Great Blue Heron flying over the Mississippi River in St. Paul was reported.
- 29 Leap Day! At about 5:45 pm, between 300 and 400 American crows flew into roost in Loring Park in downtown Minneapolis. Their fly-in time has been progressively later as sunset has moved later. Close to 6" of snow covers the landscape.



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