



FEBRUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2015

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

February is frosty yet pleasant, a month of frozen beauty and survival. Songs, flights and feathers signal courtship among many bird species. The first half of the month usually remains cold and cloudy, but warmer temperatures and sunshine often appear mid-month and continue on into March. 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 2016 with last year.

February 1 * So far we are a little over 13 inches below normal snowfall, and the Twin Cities landscape is about half snow-free. MN is home to about 2,300 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles and their nesting season has recently begun.

FEB.
2

In northern MN and WI, Common Ravens perform awesome aerial acrobatics in the sky, preparing for courtship.



February 3 * An early afternoon feeding frenzy, involving numerous birds at feeding stations, warns of coming snowfall. By mid-afternoon the snow begins to fall and the Twin Cities ends up with 2 inches. It will turn out to be the biggest snowfall of the month.

February 5 * Red foxes are normally solitary but now appear in pairs as their mating season approaches. Five Eastern Bluebirds come to a heated birdbath in Morristown.

February 8 * American Goldfinches begin to show some new, bright yellow feathers on their heads and necks. It's another sign of the coming spring.

FEB.
9

A few European starlings are showing yellow beaks. Their bills change from black to yellow for the upcoming nesting season.



February 11 * At our latitude, this is the date that greenhouse workers once again notice plants coming out of dormancy and starting to grow. Due to the Sun's higher position in the sky, from this date on it will be hot and humid in greenhouses on sunny days. Also, cars warm up on the inside if parked in the sunlight now—even on cold days.

February 13 * Some brown-colored red oak leaves that have clung to their branches since last growing season are falling; a very subtle spring sign.

February 14 * On this windy below-zero morning, the wonderful whistled songs of the Northern Cardinals make us take note; our minds think of warmer days.

February 18 * First odor of a skunk wafts. Average depth of Lake Waconia ice is 24 inches.

February 19 * Wintering Common Loons from MN enjoy warmer waters of Florida, Mississippi and Texas coasts.

February 21 * At a feeding station on the edge of Northfield, 20 species come lately, including about 100 House Finches, 24 cardinals, and up to 24 Wild Turkeys. Flocks of Common Redpolls are numerous at many northern MN feeding stations, and at some southern MN feeders.

FEB.
24

Some Great Horned owl pairs are now feeding newly hatched nestlings. In southern MN, Bald Eagle pairs are adding sticks to their nests, and a few have already laid eggs.



February 27 * Horned Larks, one of the earliest migrants to return, appear in pairs and flocks of up to about 20 birds along southern MN roads. In northern MN, black bear cubs are now about one month old and weigh a bit less than three pounds each. They nestle close to their slumbering mothers.

February 28 * Only up to about an inch of snow covers the Twin Cities and Waconia area, and there are many bare lawns and fields. Mourning Doves frequent feeding stations.