



# JANUARY PHENOLOGY

*A reflective look at 2015*

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

*January's cold temperatures, white sales and resolutions* may mask early signs of spring to those less astute to nature's signs. Yet, harbingers of the seasonal transition abound. 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.

**January 1** \* Four inches of snow covers the landscape. About 1,000 people brave icy Lake Minnetonka on this 30°F afternoon and jump into the water to celebrate New Year's Day. Bird feeding stations are quite busy with Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, and more.

**January 2** \* During the Christmas Bird Count for the Sax-Zim area near Cotton in St. Louis County, 15 observers saw 33 bird species and over 1,000 individual birds, including 495 Pine Siskins, 494 Common Redpolls, 39 Evening Grosbeaks, 10 Pine Grosbeaks, 9 Sharp-tailed Grouse, 5 Great Gray Owls, 5 Rough-legged Hawks, 3 Boreal Chickadees, and a single Northern Cardinal.

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**On this -10°F morning a Downy Woodpecker drums its territory; a very early spring sound. Also, I hear my first of the year "fee-bee" or "spring-soon" whistled song of the Black-capped Chickadee. This afternoon there's a feeding frenzy with chickadees and Dark-eyed Juncos, plus ten other bird species at our feeding station, starting several hours before a snowfall arrives.**



**January 7** \* First Blue Jay "pump-handle"—also known as the "speelunker" call—greet listeners in Victoria.

**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 8** \* First of the season Northern Cardinal sings its spring "what-cheer, cheer...." song, telling us that one season slides slowly into the next.

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**Birders watch about 1,400 American Robins roost in a grove of about a dozen spruce trees in south Minneapolis. Nearly all of the robins arrive each afternoon in a 20-minute period starting about 15 minutes before sunset.**



**January 12** \* Downy Woodpeckers drum on tree branches or other "signal posts." They do this to announce territories and establish pair bonds.

**January 15** \* This morning, along with a Black-capped Chickadee singing "fee-bee" and a Downy Woodpecker drumming, I hear my first of the year White-breasted Nuthatch "whi, whi, whi..."; its spring song.

**January 17** \* A survey near and along the Mississippi River where MN, IA and WI come together results in 136 Golden Eagles, 500 Red-tailed Hawks, and 1,700 Bald Eagles.

**January 18** \* At a feeding station in Northfield, 21 visitors include Northern Cardinals, Mourning Doves, Pileated Woodpeckers, Pine Siskins, plus 2 Northern Flickers and 2 White-throated Sparrows.

**January 21** \* One-half hour before sunrise, Dark-eyed Juncos, American Tree Sparrows, and Northern Cardinals arrive at feeding stations. House Finches begin singing.

**January 24** \* Snowy Owls appear in scattered areas across MN. Pileated Woodpeckers start drumming today in the Lutsen/Tofte area. Yes, it's a spring sign!

**January 26** \* It's egg-laying time for Great Horned Owls, the earliest MN bird to hatch young each year.

**January 30** \* The first migrating Horned Larks of the year arrive near Dundas, MN.