



December

PHENOLOGY & CHECKLIST

Naturalist Jim Gilbert's observations from this time last year, plus a seasonal checklist of backyard tasks.

DEC

01

Meteorologists in the Upper Midwest consider today to be the first day of winter because statistically it's the kick-off for the coldest 90 days of the year.

DEC

02

Most all raccoons are now in their sleeping dens.

DEC

06

At a feeding station in Faribault, observers count 36 **Northern Cardinals** at one time. **Pine Siskins**, **Fox** and **American Tree Sparrows** are among some of the other birds visiting.

DEC

07

"Official freeze-up" is the day when at least 90% of a pond or lake freezes over and stays ice-covered. Freeze-ups today include: Mille Lacs Lake (Garrison), Swede Lake and Lake Waconia (Carver County), and Cannon Lake and French Lake (Faribault). 33 **Bald Eagles** appear over one bay of Lake Minnetonka today, while more than 1,000 diving ducks make good use of open water.

DEC

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The red fruit on sumacs, high-bush cranberry and winterberry shrubs, plus many varieties of crabapple trees is a bold burst of color on the winter landscape. All this fruit provides food for birds and other wildlife.

DEC

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Northern Cardinals often arrive at feeding stations close to 25 minutes before sunrise. Together with numerous **Dark-eyed Juncos** and **Mourning Doves**, they consume cracked corn scattered on the ground below feeders.

DEC

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Today is the official freeze-up date for Lake Minnetonka. During freeze-over times, remember that it takes at least 4 inches of new solid ice in contact with stationary water for safe walking, skating and ice fishing; 8 to 12 inches are needed for a car or small truck. In 32°F water a person will only survive about 15 minutes before losing consciousness.

DEC

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Up to 42 **Mallard Ducks** fly into a Golden Valley backyard daily at about 4:00pm to feed on whole corn. The birds probably come from a pond in the neighborhood kept ice-free.

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More observers are hearing the duet hooting of **Great Horned Owls** lately. The birds are not only keeping in touch but are establishing nesting territories. They are the first of the Upper Midwest birds to nest each year, and egg-laying begins in late January.



- ☐ Decorate your deck and yard with **seed ball ornaments** and **seed shapes!**



- ☐ Attract ground-feeding Dark-eyed Juncos, American Tree Sparrows and Mourning Doves by casting **Finches' Choice** on the ground beneath bird feeders.

- ☐ Use a **heated birdbath** or **heated insert** to provide fresh water throughout the winter.

- ☐ Prevent bill sweeping, a seed scattering behavior, by using a hanging **seed cylinder feeder**. Fill with **Flaming Hot Feast** to deter squirrels.

- ☐ Add a **Weather Guard** to your **Squirrel Buster Plus feeder** to keep seed drier.

- ☐ Remove lime deposits from your **heated birdbath** by filling it with 50% water and 50% white vinegar. Cover it with a plastic bag for 30 minutes, scrub, and then rinse.

- ☐ Darkness can extend for 15 hours. Spend a few minutes in the daylight filling your feeders and watching birds.

- ☐ Read **A Year In Nature** by Stan Tekiela.

- ☐ Watch for Bald Eagles fishing the open waters of the Mississippi and around the marinas on area lakes.



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(Continued from front)

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Between now and Dec. 24, sunlight is at it's minimum and casts the longest shadows.



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Screech Owls often roost in **Wood Duck** houses. Gray squirrels and other animals also use these nesting boxes for winter shelter.

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Freeze-up date for Grindstone Lake near Sandstone; it's a deep lake, so one of the last to become ice covered in MN.

DEC
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Today we gain our first full minute of daylight—a nice gift! Forty years of statistics reveal that there is a 92% chance of a white Christmas at International Falls, with one inch or more of snow, and a 72% chance in the Twin Cities. Officially at MSP International Airport there is one inch of snow on the ground today.

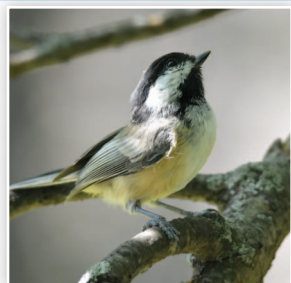
DEC
26

On these cold days (below zero across MN today), we notice the elegant frost designs of miniature forests, fronds and feathers on some clear glass window panes.

DEC
29

Flying squirrels visit a good number of bird/wildlife feeding stations beginning soon after sunset, including in urban areas as long as there are mature trees. They feed on seeds, suet and peanut butter. Flood lights pointed at feeders don't scare these small squirrels, nor does the presence of someone sitting outside quietly watching them.

DEC
31



It's bitter cold this morning. Minus 32°F at International Falls, and -30°F at Bemidji. Minus 24°F at Lake Waconia, but by 11:30am the temperature is up to -13°F, and a **Black-capped Chickadee** sings the whistled "fee-bee" song over and over. This welcome sound is considered to be an early sign of spring.

☐ Flocks of Cedar Waxwings feed on fruits of junipers, mountain ash and crabapple trees and are attracted to the open water in a **heated birdbath**.

☐ Raccoons are slumbering but are not true hibernators. When nighttime temps are 20°F or above they may be out foraging. Use a **baffle** to keep them from climbing the bird feeder pole.



☐ Goldfinches will visit feeders year round. Jostle feeders to release clumped or frozen seed.

☐ Listen for Great Horned Owl pairs hooting a duet back and forth.

☐ Feeders are busy a half-hour before sunrise and after sunset. Look for cardinals, Dark-eyed Juncos, and American Tree Sparrows at these times.

☐ Flying Squirrels may visit nightly. Look for them on bird feeders, especially about 5 pm.

☐ Participate in the Christmas Bird Count: audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count

☐ Over-wintering robins visit heated birdbaths and eat the fruit of high bush cranberry shrubs, bittersweet vines and crabapple trees. Use a **tray feeder** near the birdbath to feed robins mealworms and **Berry Nutty**.

