

FEBRUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2016

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

February is often 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. 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 2017 with last year.

February 2 * Close to 9 inches of snow fall on the Twin Cities and area. Fresh tracks from squirrels, cottontail rabbits, and more crisscross the landscape. A few Common Redpolls make an appearance.



The first House Finch sings today; it's an early sign of the coming spring.

February 5 * Red oaks shed some of their brown leaves; another subtle spring sign.

February 6 * The first-of-the-season male Wild Turkeys make gobbling sounds today in the Northfield area.

February 7 * We've gained 1 hour and 17 minutes of daylight since the winter solstice on December 21. Bald Eagle pairs arrive at their old nests. The first Blue Jays, in a small noisy flock, give "pumphandle" spring calls, also known as the "speelunker" spring call.

American Goldfinches are now showing a bit of new yellow. Ice on Lake Waconia is mostly 12 to 16 inches thick.



February 13 * Red-bellied Woodpeckers become very vocal. In SE MN, flocks of about a dozen Horned Larks gather along country roads, and a few Eastern Bluebirds make the scene.

February 17 * Quite a few raccoons are out and about after spending weeks in their winter dens.

February 19 * Rain falls today! The high temperature is in the mid-40°Fs. Only about an inch of snow is left on the landscape. The first maple sap flows early.

February 20 * Red-tailed Hawks are returning. Some Bald Eagles are on nests, incubating. Lake Superior is still wide open. At Lutsen, Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls are among the birdfeeder birds, Pileated Woodpeckers are vocal and drumming, and trails are groomed and in good condition for cross-country skiing.

February 22 * The first migrating Sandhill Cranes return to the Wabasha area. 17 bird species come to a Faribault feeding station, including many American Tree Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos; and just before dark, over 30 Northern Cardinals at one time.

February 24 * First eastern chipmunks are out.

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26

A pair of Eastern Bluebirds go in and out of a nesting box in Faribault.

February 27 * A record high temperature of 58°F at MSP Int'l Airport shatters the 1896 record high of 54° for today's date. Reports of excellent maple sap runs flow in. The first scarlet cup fungus emerges in a forest. Flocks of Canada Geese head north over Faribault and Victoria. The first Osprey arrives in Hennepin County, and the first couple of Turkey Vultures return to SE MN. On the edge of Northfield, pairs of Canada Geese stand atop pond and marsh ice.

February 28 * We've gained 2 hours and 18 minutes of daylight since December 21, the winter solstice. The first Twin Cities golf course opens.

February 29 * On this leap day, only small patches of snow remain on the landscape. We've measured only 30.8 inches of snow for the season so far; 41.7 inches is the normal at MSP Int'l Airport.



FEB.

3

FEB.

10