



JANUARY PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2016

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

January averages out as the coldest and snowiest month of the year here in Minnesota. Yet if a person is observant, they'll notice signs of one season sliding slowly into another as the daylight lengthens. 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.

January 1 * About 4 inches of snow cover the landscape on this New Year's Day. It was partly sunny and 16°F at 8:40am when I heard my first-of-the-year Black-capped Chickadee whistled song. The bird sang "fee-bee" over and over; a most pleasant early spring sound. Birders in Northfield listen to a Downy Woodpecker drumming. Woodpeckers drum to attract mates and declare nesting territories. We consider drumming to be a spring sign. Three Snowy Owls stop over in western Dodge County.

January 3 * Some of the birds now coming to heated birdbaths for a drink include Eastern Bluebirds, Pine Siskins, Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, and Black-capped Chickadees.

A thick coating of white frost creates a winter wonderland and the perfect backdrop at 9am for my first-of-the-year hearing of the nasal "whi, whi, whi..." spring song of the White-breasted Nuthatch.



January 6 * First Northern Cardinal sings its "what-cheer, cheer..." spring song. Wintering Mourning Doves feed on cracked corn and millet scattered on the ground. About 2 feet of snow covers the Gunflint Trail area where Gray Jays, Pine Grosbeaks and flocks of Common Redpolls abide.

January 10 * At sunrise, with a clear sky and the thermometer reading -16°F on the edge of Lake Waconia, I hear a Black-capped Chickadee singing "fee-bee" several times.

January 12 * Close to 50 Mallard Ducks fly into a Golden Valley backyard late each afternoon recently to feed on whole corn put out for them. Steam fog coming off Lake Superior waters this below zero morning is a beautiful sight enjoyed by many in Duluth.

January 14 * Pairs of Great Horned Owls hoot duets. They often incubate eggs by the end of January.

January 16 * Observers in Northfield count 19 bird species at a feeding station, including over 60 Mourning Doves, 15 Blue Jays, a dozen Northern Cardinals, and 2 Northern Flickers. About 30 Ring-necked Pheasants visit a feeding station near Faribault.

January 17 * The low of -14°F at MSP Int'l Airport is the coldest in nearly 2 years. Official Twin Cities snow depth is 5 inches and we have only received 17.2 inches for the season. The low at Waconia is -20°F and -28°F at Bemidji.

January 18 * The Twin Cities reaches above zero after 47 hours of below zero temps. This is the 40th anniversary of the recovery of the first tagged monarch butterfly in an over-wintering colony in the volcanic mountains west of Mexico City. The butterfly was in excellent condition and had traveled a straight-line distance of 1,750 miles from the prairie at the U of MN Landscape Arboretum, where two Hopkins West Junior High students and I tagged it on Sept. 6, 1975.

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Screech Owls sometimes roost—and later in spring nest—in wood duck nesting boxes. A Screech Owl calls a steady trill in Farmington this morning.



January 22 * Blue Jays love peanuts in the shell; they come to feeders at first light. About 1,200 Bohemian Waxwings are in Grand Marais, feeding on mountain ash fruit.

January 24 * We've gained 41 minutes of daylight since Dec. 21, the winter solstice. The Horned Lark migration into southern MN is beginning. In NE MN, Common Ravens do elaborate courtship flight maneuvers.

January 31 * Second consecutive day above 40°F. Snow depth is only an inch or two. Some skunks are out of their winter sleeping dens. Chickadees, nuthatches, cardinals, and Blue Jays vocalize their special spring songs.

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