



MARCH PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2016

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

March can be a snowy time, but by the end of the month storms are more likely to bring rain than snow. Listed below are a few observations from a year ago in the Minneapolis/St. Paul and Waconia area, and beyond when indicated. These events can be used to anticipate spring happenings and will help compare this year with last.

March 1 ✱ Only patches of snow remain. House Finches and Northern Cardinals sing early and often.

March 3 ✱ A Great Horned Owl pair begins feeding newly hatched young.

March 5 ✱ An over-wintering male Mourning Dove is cooing for the first time this season.

March 6 ✱ On this first 60°F day of the year, maple syrup producers report very good sap runs, the first common snowdrop flowers open, and the first migratory American Robins return. Huge migrations of waterfowl move into southern MN, including Canada, White-fronted and Snow Geese, plus more than a dozen duck species.



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High of 64°F. Killdeers and male Red-winged Blackbirds first arrive. Western chorus frogs begin calling in Faribault.

March 8 ✱ First 70°F day; on average this doesn't happen until April 12. Dark-eyed Juncos begin singing their spring songs, a musical trilling. The warmth helps bring back the first Wood Ducks and Tundra Swans, plus many more Red-winged Blackbirds. Ice is looking dark on lakes, and rings of open water form. Two birders in Hugo report at least four American Woodcocks displaying.

March 9 ✱ Excellent maple sap run. Sandhill Cranes start arriving in the Chisago City area.

March 11 ✱ Even patches of snow are gone. High of 66°F. Honey bees visit common snowdrop flowers. Eastern Bluebirds sing, Canada Geese honk, Red-winged Blackbirds trill, and Common Grackles sound their raspy calls. As ice leaves a pond, the first painted turtle is up sunning on a log.

March 12 ✱ High of 70°F. Silver maples bloom and

honey bees collect their pollen. A first woodchuck is out.

March 13 ✱ It's time to get those Wood Duck nesting boxes cleaned out and ready. Keep your feeders filled and enjoy watching the new migrants.

March 15 ✱ First thunderstorm. Ice-out today includes Lake Harriet in Minneapolis.

March 16 ✱ The ice cover exits Lake Waconia (average ice-out is April 10). Today marks the opening of shipping season on the Mississippi River at St. Paul.

March 17 ✱ Official ice-out date for Lake Minnetonka. This is the earliest date in 138 years.

March 22 ✱ The landscape is white again this morning from a 1-inch snowfall. This is our first snowfall in over two weeks, and it doesn't last. First Canada Geese are on nests. Wood Ducks begin checking out nest boxes. First crocus flowers open.

March 23 ✱ Pairs of Eastern Bluebirds claim nesting boxes. In Northfield, 40 Northern Cardinals at one time visit a feeding station during a heavy, wet snowfall.

March 27 ✱ Common Loons begin their return to lakes in central Minnesota.

March 28 ✱ Canada Geese are grazing on new green grasses on south-facing slopes. Both western chorus frogs and wood frogs are calling.



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First Wood Duck eggs. First sharp-lobed hepatica and bloodroot flowers open in woodlands. Pasqueflowers bloom.

March 31 ✱ Forsythia shrubs display golden-yellow flowers. Some Ospreys return to nest sites. March 2016 ends up being the fifth warmest on record.