

March

PHENOLOGY & CHECKLIST

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

MAR

01

March comes in like a lamb. A couple tenths of snow falls in the early morning, but is gone in the afternoon. The temperature hits a high of 37°F, the landscape is nearly snow free, and sugar maple sap runs well. At Somerskogen Sugarbush in Minnetrista, they've produced 100 gallons of maple syrup so far this season; in years past they didn't start syruping until the second or third week in March.

MAR

03

Male **Red-winged Blackbirds** trill in marshlands (the first ones returned Feb. 22) and visit our feeding station. **Northern Cardinals** sing loud and long. The fuzzy, silver-gray pussy willow catkins are out. A **Turkey Vulture** glides in the sky over Hennepin County. At Gray Cloud Island in St. Paul Park, **mallards, Gadwalls, American Wigeons, and Ring-billed Gulls** arrive.



MAR

05

Today's high is 59°F. A first **Killdeer** arrives. A few crocuses bloom on the south sides of homes. **Eastern Bluebirds** claim nesting boxes. Many observers note the start of **Wild Turkeys'** spring courtship; tom turkeys are gobbling, flaring their tails and strutting.

MAR

06

A high of 65°F at MSP Int'l Airport marks the warmest temperature this early in the year since 2000. It's even warmer outstate: 70°F in Mankato, and 74°F in Redwood Falls. Maple sap runs are excellent. Ice leaves most ponds today. The first **Wood Ducks** return. **American Woodcocks** make "peenting" vocalizations in Hugo. Vernal witch-hazel shrub flowers are wide open. The earliest tornado touchdowns in MN recorded history occur today in the Zimmerman and other southern MN areas.



MAR

08

A first **Great Blue Heron** arrives.

MAR

09

The first **Common Grackles** arrive. Observers watch the first **Bald Eagle** egg hatch on the MN DNR Eagle Cam. A first towboat makes its way to St. Paul, marking the beginning of Mississippi River navigation season (March 22 is the average date).

MAR

10

Suddenly, winter is back. Today's high is 19°F and low is only 5°F. It's our coldest morning in a month. Lake Waconia is steaming like mad. **Canada Geese, Sandhill Cranes and Red-winged Blackbirds** voice their disapprovals.



- ☐ Look high overhead for flocks of migrating Tundra Swans and Snow Geese. On a bird walk, watch for early migrants: Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Eastern Phoebe and Yellow-rumped Warblers.
- ☐ Mount a **Wood Duck house** on a pole and protect with a **baffle**.
- ☐ Open **Purple Martin houses** after martins are seen in the area.
- ☐ Beginning in early March, be ready with **live mealworms** for returning Eastern Bluebirds.
- ☐ Clean out **birdhouses** from last year and replace cracked or damaged houses. See our *Nesting Notes* handout for placement tips.
- ☐ Put up a **wren house** and a **chickadee house**, placing the chickadee house out of direct line of sight of nesting wrens to reduce territorial conflicts.
- ☐ Provide nesting materials with **The Best Nest Builder™**.
- ☐ Use seed in pre-formed seed cylinders or seed cakes like **Bugs, Nuts & Fruit, Golden Safflower, Flaming Hot Feast** or **Wild Bird Feast** to prevent starlings and House Sparrows from scattering seed and to prevent deer from licking the feeders clean at night.
- ☐ Red-winged Blackbirds return in March. Fill feeders with **Golden Safflower**, which attracts cardinals, goldfinches, chickadees, House Finches and more but is less interesting to grackles, starlings and Red-wings.



March PHENOLOGY & CHECKLIST

(Continued from front)



MAR 11 A first **Fox Sparrow** arrives. A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** appears in Cottonwood in SW MN.

MAR 15 Today's low temperature is in the single digits. About 2 inches of snow covers the landscape. **Canada Geese** honking and **Red-winged Blackbirds** trilling sounds like spring, but cold air makes us think of deep winter.

MAR 17 Today's high is 43°F. Sugar maple trees "wake-up" and sap begins running again following the recent cold spell. Only patches of snow remain.

MAR 19 Today's high is 55°F. Maple sap runs very well. More migrating birds arrive, especially waterfowl, gulls and **Great Blue Herons**. Migrating **Tundra Swans** land in Weaver marshes south of Wabasha.

MAR 20 It's the vernal equinox, the start of astronomical spring in the Northern Hemisphere. Over a 1,000 ducks and a few **American Coots** gather on Lake Waconia's wide-open waters. **Red-wings**, **Northern Cardinals**, **Mourning Doves**, and **Sandhill Cranes** vocalize in the Lake Waconia area. These are all sounds I didn't hear in the Lutsen/Tofte area yesterday.

MAR 23 **Dark-eyed Juncos** begin singing. **Canada Geese** are nest building.

MAR 24 An influx of **American Robins** forage on lawns. **American Crows** build nests. For those keeping track, southern MN lakes that had ice-outs as early as March 6, only to refreeze, are now ice-free again.

MAR 25 Migrating **Golden-crowned** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** arrive in SE MN.



MAR 27 Today's high is 61°F. It's the official ice-out date for Lake Minnetonka (median ice-out is April 14). The first western chorus frogs call and the first painted turtles are up and sunning themselves. The first female **Red-winged Blackbirds** and male **Brown-headed Cowbirds** visit a Waconia feeding station.

MAR 29 **House Finches** are vocal, silver maples bloom, and the male catkins on quaking aspens extend downward like mini-windsocks. A dozen **Tree Swallows** circle over and over above a pond in Faribault.

MAR 30 I hear and see my first-of-year **Song Sparrow**. A first bat is flying (probably a little brown). Masses of garter snakes sun themselves. An **Eastern Bluebird** nest near Northfield has four eggs. For the Twin Cities, March 2017 ends up being the nineteenth consecutive warmer-than-average month.

❑ Reapply **WindowAlert™** decals each spring to prevent window collisions. For especially problematic areas of the house, use **ABC Bird Tape** for full window coverage.



❑ Bring feeders to your neighborhood All Seasons store for cleaning. Fees apply.

❑ Cracked feeders allow water to pool in the birdseed causing mold and mildew growth. Replace damaged feeders with new easy-to-clean versions such as the **Squirrel Buster** family of feeders or **Aspects Quick Clean** feeders.

❑ Scrub birdbaths with 9 parts water and 1 part bleach then use **Bird Bath Protector** to keep it clean.

❑ Moving water attracts more birds. Try a **Water Wiggler™** in the bath or an **Easy Mister** in your garden.

❑ Rake up shell debris and dispose of in the trash while wearing a mask.

❑ Use no-mess seed and mixes such as **Medium Chips** and **Kracker Jax** for enjoyable bird feeding that leave no shells to clean up.

❑ Measure 12' from trees and install a pole with a **squirrel baffle** or **Tough Bird Feeder Guard** for squirrel resistant feeding. See our handout, **Discouraging Squirrels**, for advice.



❑ Plan to add bird, bee and butterfly friendly plants to your landscape. Check out our **Birdscaping Basics** handout for helpful ideas.

❑ Watch Bald Eagles raise their young at ustream.tv/DecorahEagles