



DECEMBER PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2010

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

December's dramatic landscapes of frosted trees, iced-over lakes and sparkling new snow provide a dazzling backdrop for day-to-day activities. Holiday lights brighten long-stretching nights as sunshine reaches its minimum for the year. Human "snow birds" start planning getaways as temperatures drop around the last week of December.

December 1 * Flying squirrels appear at many feeding stations after dark, where they relish sunflower seeds and suet.

December 3 * Lake Harriet, Lake Calhoun and Lake Minnetonka freeze over. During a snowfall this late afternoon in Northfield, 48 Northern Cardinals and 22 Mourning Doves gather at a single feeding station.

December 3 * Some Screech Owls roost at night in Wood Duck nest boxes.

December 13 * Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Mourning Doves visit heated birdbaths.

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On the Audubon Christmas Bird Count for the Faribault/Northfield area of Rice County, 53 people observe 50 species and 6,477 individual birds, including 514 Black-capped Chickadees, 288 Northern Cardinals, and 13 Rough-legged Hawks.



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A total of 17.1" of snow falls at MSP International Airport, making this the fifth greatest snowstorm to hit the Twin Cities since modern-day records began back in 1891. During the falling snow there's a feeding frenzy among the Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, American Goldfinches and other backyard birds.



December 12 * The Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome roof collapses as the result of the previous day's snowfall. A Brown Thrasher comes to a feeding station for cracked corn, suet and mixed seeds. About 20 Snow Buntings in a flock visit a Chisago City feeding station.



December 19 * The Cedar Creek Bog Christmas Bird Count yields 37 species, including 35 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 6 Common Ravens and a Belted Kingfisher.

December 23 * American Tree Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Northern Cardinals are the first and last birds at feeding stations each day. They begin coming about 25 minutes before sunrise and continue to come until about 25 minutes after sunset. All three species prefer to eat on the ground.

December 25 * A flock of about 350 wintering American Robins visit a Bloomington neighborhood. Their winter diet includes hackberry fruit, mountain ash berries and crab apples. They roost in evergreen groves.

December 31 * Untold millions of critters, including toads, frogs, snapping turtles, garter snakes, bats, Woodchucks, beetles and mosquito larvae, hibernate across Minnesota.