

March Phenology

a reflective look at 2008

Jim Gilbert



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According to meteorologists, spring in the Upper Midwest begins each year on March 1. Astronomers tell us that spring begins on the vernal equinox - this year (2009) at 6:44 a.m. on March 20. March could be the peak of the snow season, but it's also our first month of real spring, the awakening season. By the end of the month, storms bring rain more often than snow. Mild days with occasional rain or snow, and the greening landscape, characterizes the month of April.

- 1 Black-capped Chickadee investigates nestbox. Lake Pepin is covered with 29" of ice.
- 4 About 4" of crunchy snow on the landscape. Plowed fields and south-facing slopes are nearly snow-free.
- 11 First American Robin migrants arrive.
- 12 High of 43 degrees F. First spring rain and first maple sap running.
- 13 First time we hit 50 degrees F in 2008. First temporary ponds on landscape. Lake Waconia ice is 30 inches thick, and sunfish and crappies are biting.
- 14 Mourning Doves heard cooing. Pairs of Canada Geese seen on nesting territories.
- 15 First Great Blue Heron.
- 17 First Killdeers. American Crows are nest building. First Gadwalls and Buffleheads at Coon Rapids Dam.
- 19 High temperature of 48 degrees F. Very good maple

sap flow. First Western Chorus Frogs heard. First male Red-winged Blackbirds arrive. Bald Eagles active over Mississippi River area of the Twin Cities. It takes 4 years and a few months for bald eagles to get full white head and tail.

- 20 Landscape about 75 percent snow-free. First Common Grackles return.
- 21 Spring snowstorm. We ended up with about a foot of snow. First Wood Ducks return. First Brown-headed Cowbird.
- 23 High of 32 degrees F. Good icicle growing day.
- 24 First crocus flower opens in garden.
- 26 High of 46 degrees F. New snow is melting. Maple sap run continues to flow.
- 29 High of 48 degrees F. First flocks of migrating Tundra Swans heard and seen. Also sighted: first flock of Double-crested Cormorants and the first Song Sparrow.
- 30 We have gained 3 hours and 55 minutes of daylight since the winter solstice last December 22. First Eastern Phoebe, Osprey and Turkey Vultures. Two Hermit Thrushes, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and an American Woodcock were seen at River Bend Nature Center in Faribault. The first American White Pelicans arrive at Iowa Lake on southern Minnesota border, and at Swan Lake in Nicollet County.
- 31 March went out like a lion. Another spring snowstorm dropped 5.5" of snow. Influx of migrating Dark-eyed Juncos.



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1 Pairs of Canada Geese stand on pond and marsh ice, declaring nesting territories. Eastern Phoebes, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Great Egrets all seen at Black Dog Power Plant in Burnsville.

2 Dark-eyed Juncos numerous at feeding stations. First snowdrops blooming in garden.

3 High of 55 degrees F in Twin Cities today; warmest since last November 13. Scarlet cup fungus found in forests. Mourning cloak butterfly on the wing. First Belted Kingfishers, Common Loons, Pied-billed grebes and Greater Yellowlegs have arrived. First Fox Sparrows at a feeding station in Victoria. The “yelping of hounds” is heard as Tundra Swans fly over. Sandhill Cranes seen at Elm Creek Park.

4 First 60 degree F or above day (9 days later than normal). High of 61 degrees. Two Twin Cities area golf courses opened, but we still have patches of snow on the landscape. Migrating female American robins have returned. They sing and call until 8:32 p.m.

5 High of 66 degrees F. Pussy willow catkins are showy. First common dandelion blooming. Garter Snakes came out to sun themselves. Wood Ducks begin egg laying. More Eastern bluebirds arrived. Northern Flickers back and calling. Osprey seen carrying a stick to its nest. First Dark-eyed Junco returns to Lutsen. From Lutsen to Henderson and beyond, Bald Eagles are incubating eggs.

10 First tug and barges came through Hastings and on into St. Paul today, marking the opening of the Mississippi River shipping season.

11 First green grasses on south slopes. Male American Goldfinches now have most of their new bright yellow feathers.

15 High of 67 degrees F. First Purple Martins. Sharp-lobed hepaticas have begun blooming in the forests. Pasqueflowers now blooming on the Kasota Prairie.

16 First Tree Swallows and Chipping Sparrows. First Chimney Swift seen over downtown Faribault.

17 First Barn Swallows and White-throated Sparrows. At Lutsen, first Yellow-rumped Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets arrived, and first Ruffed Grouse was drumming.

18 First Yellow-headed Blackbirds and first American Coots returned to Lake Waconia.

20 First 70 degree reading of the year. First daffodils in bloom. First bloodroots blooming in forest.

21 High of 77 degrees F. First thunderstorm. First Brown Thrasher.

23 Official ice-out for Lake Minnetonka (average ice-out over the years is April 13).

26 First rhubarb pulled for sauce. ‘Northern Sun’ forsythia shrubs are loaded with bright yellow flowers. First male Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

29 Last patches of snow melted. Garden crocuses blooming nicely. Wild Turkeys have begun nesting in Austin area.

30 Lawn mowing begins.



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