

**From the North Shore of Little Rock Lake in Benton Co.
DECEMBER 2012 WEATHER & PHENOLOGY IN REVIEW**

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WEATHER:

It was significantly cooler and a lot more precipitation/snow than last December. More low readings recorded single digit and eight days with below zero readings compared to only three below zero days last year. Last December started our winter that was not a winter. We ended last December with temperatures in the 40s. This December started mild. By mid-month temps started dropping and we ended the month with below zero temperatures. The recorded low was -7.4 degrees (F) on the 25th while the high was 53.2 degrees (F) on the 4th. The average low and high was 10.48 and 30.37 degrees (F) respectively. Four degrees cooler than last year's averages.

I recorded snow/rain on twelve days. Our big snow lasted two days (9th & 10th) when I measured 13 inches of snow that melted down to 0.82 inches of liquid. A half inch of rain on the 15th & 16th reduced the 13 inches of snow to only 5.2 inches. The snow was really welcome. It protected plants and mound septic systems from the cold. We ended the month with 1.49 inches of precipitation and 15.1 inches of snow. This calendar year total precipitation was only 30.37 inches. Several inches below normal. I've recorded 17.1 inches of snow so far this snow season. Only 5.6 inches of snow is still on the ground. Still, a vast improvement from past months and last December.

LOCAL WEATHER RECORDS IN DECEMBER:

The record low and high temperatures were -42 degrees (F) in 1884 and 63 degrees (F) in 1939 respectively. The most snow fell in 2008 when we removed no less than 29.7 inches from our roads and driveways at the N. End of Little Rock Lake.

PHENOLOGY:

The unusual first. On the 1st there were only a couple of inches of ice extending out a short distance in the lake. The ice near shore was clear. My neighbor, Dave Soderholm exclaimed "look, there are a few Leopard Frogs swimming under the ice." Sure enough, there they were. I think some warm weather woke them up. I've never observed that before!

The flying squirrels are back. A pair have found a vacated bird house just above the bird feeder. They come out often, scampering back and forth from their house to the feeder. They come out two or three hours after dark. They do not seem to mind the yard light at all. They are interesting to observe. They are nocturnal, the reason most folks do not observe them.

Our winter birds seem, in general, to be down in numbers. On the 30th in the morning for an hour I observed: 3-Mourning Doves, 2- Red Cardinals, a lot of Juncos and Gold Finches, a Pileated, Hairy, and Downy Woodpecker and a couple of hungry bunnies looking for cracked corn on the ground. One sharp-shinned hawk came thru looking for a meal but left hungry. Emil Williams who lives just outside of Rice observed more than fifteen redpolls at his feeder. I only see them occasionally. Darlene Hiscock in Rice still has 5 - 8 Eurasian Collared Doves at her feeder on a regular basis. They don't seem to mind the cold at all.

Jan and I visited friends in Tacoma, WA and had the opportunity to observe some birds that were really colorful. Look them up in your book. They were: Wilson's Warbler, Varied Thrush that had a lot of orange color and a Steller's Jay that is almost black where ours are white. They all loved suet.

At the end of the month anglers report about twelve inches of ice on Little Rock Lake. I counted seventy-two fish houses and several vehicles. One needs to be careful on LRL. Water currents and other issues can make for unsafe ice conditions. BE CAREFUL and fish with a friend. Make sure you have your cell phone with you. What will January 2013 bring?