



2015 Hawkwatch Season by David Tetlow, Official Counter

The 2015 spring season marked the 38th consecutive season that standardized hawk counts have been conducted at Braddock Bay. It also represented the 29th year that the hawk count was conducted by Braddock Bay Raptor Research. A total of 389.75 hours were tallied over 71 days (March through May).

March

The 2015 Hawkwatch season at Braddock Bay started out rather slowly. It was cold and snowy from beginning to end. Even though the first migrant Red-tailed Hawk passed through on March 2, double digits were not reached until March 11, with a measly total of 17 raptors counted. By mid-March we had counted only 39 raptors total. At the month's end we were up to a total of 5,156 raptors. Many years ago, a.k.a. "the glory years" (back in the late 1970's and early 1980's) we would reach that number in March with Red-tails and Red-shoulders alone. The season total for Red-shouldered Hawks was 366, which is about 52% below average for a season total. Things have certainly changed.



Broad-winged Hawk—photo by Laurie Dirks

However, this March total is only a tad bit under the month average for the last 10 years (5,449) and a little over the overall average of 5,156. So March was perhaps not as bleak as it seemed.

April

April was also cold, though not much in the way of snow. The snow/ice melt off on the bay came even later than 2014, and that's saying something. The month did have its highlights however. A record day total of Turkey Vultures (6,680) occurred on April 2 and was an awesome sight. That day also gave us 20 Bald Eagles and the first Osprey of the season, which is nothing all that unusual, but is enjoyable even to the seasoned hawkwatcher.

Another highlight for April were the two Swainson's Hawks seen on April 10. These birds were enjoyed by many folks, including the HMANA Raptor ID Workshop crew in town for a tour with Frank Nicoletti and Luke Tiller. There were two other Swainson's seen this season, for a nice above average total of four.

The peak daily count for Broad-winged Hawk this season occurred on April 21, with a rather paltry 7,454 counted. It was one of only three four-digit days all season. There were no five digit days the entire season. The month's total for Broad-wings was only 12,632. We hoped we were setting up for a banner month of May.

May

May was definitely not a banner month. The lone highlight was what I will term a "probable" Short-tailed Hawk. It has been officially entered into the date on May 18 as unidentified buteo. Unfortunately, there were no others present, nor any photos obtained.

The final season total for Broad-winged Hawk (20,421) was surpassed by the final Turkey Vulture count of 24,312. This has only happened in one season prior to this year. In 2010, the Turkey Vulture count was 16,094 while the Broad-wing count was 13,842. Both seasons were similar in nature, with many days of unfavorable conditions for hawk migration.

Even with all the Turkey Vultures of 2015, there were no Black Vultures detected. Given that the last three out of five years there have been more than 10 each season (record of 18 in 2012), it seems improbable that we would not tally one.

Northern Goshawk numbers were low this season, totaling only 7 when they typically reaching double digits. Some falcon numbers were also poor. Peregrines totaled out at 18 birds, which almost matched the total for Merlin at 23.

One highlight for the season would be the continuation of good numbers of Bald Eagles. The Bald Eagle total of 521 birds is certainly encouraging, and evidence that with the right effort, birds can rebound amazingly well. The season total of 53,768 raptors is considered about average, but is a little misleading when taking in to account the Turkey Vulture total made up approximately 45% of it.

And one final highlight, we always have the next season to look forward to. For spring hawkwatching, 2016 can't come soon enough. Thank you to all who assisted with the count in 2015, including Mike Tetlow, Ed Sailer and Bridget Watts.

Braddock Bay Hawkwatch Monthly Totals by Species—Spring 2015					
Species	March	April	May	TOTAL	Season Average
Black Vulture	0	0	0	0	2
Turkey Vulture	4340	15891	4081	24312	10119
Osprey	0	104	109	213	232
Bald Eagle	19	145	357	521	169
Northern Harrier	47	303	161	511	855
Sharp-shinned Hawk	9	2480	1208	3697	6178
Cooper's Hawk	75	283	30	388	550
Northern Goshawk	1	6	0	7	42
Red-shouldered Hawk	159	201	6	366	766
Broad-winged Hawk	0	12632	7789	20421	29032
Swainson's Hawk	0	3	1	4	1
Red-tailed Hawk	449	1907	461	2817	4288
Rough-legged Hawk	33	114	5	152	367
Golden Eagle	4	24	3	31	26
American Kestrel	11	254	20	285	597
Merlin	9	8	6	23	24
Peregrine Falcon	0	5	13	18	13
Unidentified Buteo	0	0	1	1	0
Unidentified Falcon	0	1	0	1	0
TOTAL	5156	34361	14251	53768	53682