



## 2013 Hawkwatch Season by Luke Tiller, Official Counter

The 2013 spring season marks the 36th consecutive season that standardized hawk counts have been conducted at Braddock Bay. It also represented the 27th year that the hawk count was conducted by Braddock Bay Raptor Research. A total of 434.5 hours were tallied over 81 days.

March was pretty much a horror story raptor wise, especially at the beginning of the month. When you have arrived from a winter in Southern California it is a bit of a shock to find yourself suffering through sub-zero temperatures (at least measured in Celsius). The first season I came to Braddock the local paper asked me what I had done to prepare for my season and I replied that I had spent the last month sitting in a freezer in Connecticut – weirdly they didn't run with that quote. This year I might have been advised to have actually done this to get myself acclimatized.

It was a pretty painful start to the season and was nothing like the winter that never was from last season. So much for my telling my girlfriend (and dog) that Rochester wasn't that cold.... I think everyone was getting a bit of cabin fever after a week of almost no coverage.

Even though the raptor situation was pretty miserable there is always something around bird-wise to keep you somewhat occupied at Braddock, and the cold temps meant that this year we were at least registering some waterfowl out on the bay. Highlight of the early season for me was finally adding Ross's Goose to my Braddock Bay waterfowl tally. Other goodies around were the ever present Rough-legged Hawks, a Peregrine that stopped in to dramatically hunt ducks from the 'Eagle Tree', as well as Hoary and Common Redpolls, Northern Shrikes and perhaps best of all a flock of ten Sandhill Cranes that soared over the watch on March 24<sup>th</sup> – probably one of the biggest flocks of Sandhills to ever grace the site.

I was used to setting a few records at Braddock Bay and it looked like I might have another one in my sights. The month was continuing to be so bad for raptor flights that it seemed possible that we might have our worst March on record since Braddock Bay Raptor Research was founded (the watch had run for a number of years before turning 'professional' under the auspices of BBRR). Almost disappointingly by this stage (as I say if you are going to lose, lose big), the flight started to pick up as we eased towards the end of the first month's counting. As I noted on the 27<sup>th</sup>: 'it looks like Jerry Liguori will hold on to the record for the crummiest March in BBRR history - I guess he has to be famous for something to do with hawks☺.'

In the end March finished on a pretty high note with a nice push of birds on the 31<sup>st</sup> including 419 Red-shouldered Hawks and 27 Rough-legged Hawks. In my opinion it's hard to beat a nice flight of either species when it comes to watching attractive raptors passing by. In total we tallied 3,748 birds on the day including 2,848 Turkey Vultures: [https://hawkcount.org/day\\_summary.php?rsite=353&rmonth=03&ryear=2013&rday=31](https://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&rmonth=03&ryear=2013&rday=31)

It was soon approximating something like winter again as we rolled into April and spring break. The cold temperatures however could not dampen the enthusiasm of the kids that made up the participants at the fantastic BBRR 'Raptor Camp'. I think this was probably the most enthusiastic group of kids I've met at a watch, and there were definitely a few future hawkwatchers amongst the group. A Golden Eagle over the platform was a treat for them as well getting to see a couple of Red-shouldered Hawks and a Sharpie at the banding station. Although raptors were pretty few and far between, a dozen Sandhill Cranes on the 4<sup>th</sup> and a Eurasian Wigeon that was loafing on the bay kept things at least a little interesting.

On April 7<sup>th</sup> the flight finally got going again, but this time in a big way. I guess the lousy weather had been backing things up a bit, and when it broke open it really broke open. The day started with Catherine Hamilton and myself tallying an incredible flight of passerines along the parkway as we drove in from Hamlin. The day continued initially from the watch parking lot (as the passerine flight was already hectic as we rolled out of our vehicles) before we had enough of a break in the flight to make it to the hawkwatch platform. The bruised dark sky and the sun behind as well as the sheer number of birds made for one of the most visually impressive passerine flights I have ever encountered. As the day developed friends old and new arrived to enjoy the show, thankfully this included Mike Tetlow who helped track down much of the flight over the bay. By the day's end, we had tallied a **big day breaking 6,160 Turkey Vultures** (but strangely no Black



Cooper's Hawk. Photo by Sandy Dziok

(2013 Hawkwatch Season—Continued from page 1)

Vulture) as well as an incredible **81 Rough-legged Hawks**. The number of Rough-legged Hawks tallied that day (as my friend in the UK noted) was higher than what many experienced birders had probably seen in their lives. Just another day up at Braddock Bay that will stay long in the memory!

Interestingly this was to be the biggest day of the season and I think the first time in history that our biggest day's count of Turkey Vultures outnumbered our biggest day's count of Broad-winged Hawks.

[https://hawkcount.org/day\\_summary.php?rsite=353&rmonth=04&ryear=2013&rday=07](https://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&rmonth=04&ryear=2013&rday=07)

March had been pretty painful, but April was about to turn out pretty nicely. Though we did not tally one of those huge Broad-winged flights that Braddock is famous for, we did tally a pretty stunning fourteen four-figure flight days. In amongst the almost constant tick of nice days, the odd/interesting bird cropped up, including a **Short-eared Owl on April the 13<sup>th</sup>**. The 16<sup>th</sup> of the month saw us snag our **first Swainson's Hawk** of the season, admittedly not great views, but just enough to be diagnostic.

April 16 will really be much more memorable for an incredible flight of Sharp-shinned Hawks that were often at or below platform height as they skittered across the bay. The predicted wet weather held off enough to produce an amazing flight but

(Continued on page 3)

<b>Braddock Bay Hawkwatch Monthly Totals by Species—Spring 2013</b>						
<b>Species</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Season Average</b>
Black Vulture	5	6	4	0	15	2
Turkey Vulture	4151	19373	4536	241	28301	9323
Osprey	2	215	167	3	387	233
Bald Eagle	20	216	377	35	648	151
Northern Harrier	70	582	124	7	783	873
Sharp-shinned Hawk	95	4079	743	0	4917	6310
Cooper's Hawk	89	451	45	0	585	561
Northern Goshawk	1	14	3	0	18	43
Red-shouldered Hawk	620	157	0	0	777	788
Broad-winged Hawk	0	19734	14216	364	34314	29237
Swainson's Hawk	0	1	1	0	2	1
Red-tailed Hawk	597	2336	787	12	3732	4372
Rough-legged Hawk	56	134	1	0	191	378
Golden Eagle	7	15	3	0	25	25
American Kestrel	8	677	67	0	752	615
Merlin	4	26	12	0	42	24
Peregrine Falcon	2	15	13	0	30	13
Short-eared Owl	0	1	0	0	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5727</b>	<b>48032</b>	<b>21099</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>75520</b>	<b>53378</b>

(2013 Hawkwatch Season—Continued from page 2)

overcast skies, and on and off rain combined to produce a flight that remained only a few hundred yards over our heads most of the time. In amongst the **fifteen species of raptors on the day**, we also tallied 1 juvenile Trumpeter Swan, 1 Sandhill Crane (for a total of 50 on the season), 5 Saw-whet Owls and 2 Long-eared Owls in Owl Woods as well as Redpolls, Rusty Blackbirds and a Lapland Longspur or two amongst the passing passerines.

[http://hawkcount.org/day\\_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2013&rmonth=04&rday=16](http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2013&rmonth=04&rday=16)

April 19<sup>th</sup> produced another nice day with some severely weather affected birds. After what appeared to be a fairly blah day (beyond the mornings flocks of Lapland Longspurs!), we were treated to one of the most hectic pushes of storm affected birds. The day basically went from seeing what looked like a distant small kettle of Broad-winged Hawks to having more than 800 fly overhead in the space of about five minutes. Included in the five minute craziness were two Northern Goshawks, two Rough-legged Hawks and one Golden Eagle. The Broad-winged Hawks were then tracked inland to Frisbee Hill, as they turned tail and looked for a place to put down as the storm rolled in and over them.

Though things were rolling along nicely we had to wait 10 days for the next really big push of birds, which occurred on April 28<sup>th</sup>. Of course being a weekend it meant that a number of groups managed to get out to enjoy the spectacle including those from the Rochester Birding Association, Buffalo Ornithological Society and two groups from Cornell. It was so busy that day that parking was at a premium and the platform and the surrounding lawn were covered with appreciative watchers. As with much of the season's flight, the somewhat light winds eventually saw the flight trailing off inland. Whilst we were enjoying the flight at the watch, banders at Braddock Bay Bird Observatory were banding a Yellow-throated Warbler!  
[http://hawkcount.org/day\\_summary.php?rsite=353&rmonth=04&ryear=2013&rday=28](http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&rmonth=04&ryear=2013&rday=28)

Though May tends to be the time that many birders start to think about warblers and other neotropical migrants there is often still a lot happening out at the watch; highlighting that was an incredible kickoff to the month on May 1<sup>st</sup>. The day started with a flight bouncing between the park, the parkway, and Frisbee Hill. After stopping at all three spots I finally ended up back at the park just in time to share incredible views of a Swainson's Hawk that passed fairly low and right over the platform with Buffalo birder Mike Gerber. Amongst the 3,424 birds that passed the count over the day were **nine Peregrine Falcons, a new day record for the site**. Although not a huge number, nine birds is equal or more than eleven season counts since BBRR was set up (1986) and on the back of that day we tallied our third best season day of these birds (30). Again the light winds on the day meant we finished the day inland standing in the lot at a sweltering Frisbee Hill.



*Just a sample of the visitors who came out on April 28. Not pictured are the crowds that enjoyed the flight from the lawn surrounding the platform. Photo by Catherine Hamilton*

(Continued on page 4)

(2013 Hawkwatch Season—Continued from page 3)

[http://hawkcount.org/day\\_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2013&rmonth=05&rday=01](http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2013&rmonth=05&rday=01)

Typical of early May was a series of promising flights on the back of light southerly winds which tended to be swept away inland by the dreaded lake effect breeze. Sometimes flights held long enough to capture movement at the park, along the parkway (a new favored spot to set up this season), or at Frisbee, but often I found the flight drifting as far as Ridge Road (Route 104) before giving up on it. That said there was still much to enjoy with some Evening Grosbeaks getting caught up in some large passerine flights, and a first Golden-winged Warbler for the area for me personally.

May 10<sup>th</sup> was a nice day thanks to a huge Baltimore Oriole flight which I logged at West Spit, about 500 birds passing me over an hour and a half period in the morning, and then a late Rough-legged appearing at the watch later that day. Seeing how much I like sparrows it was nice to have a Clay-colored parrow at the park on the 11<sup>th</sup> and on the 12<sup>th</sup> I finally added a stunning Black Tern to my park list. Other decent birds during this period included Orchard Oriole, White-eyed Vireo, a perched family of Eastern Screech Owls in the park and Evening Grosbeaks and Orange-crowned Warblers in the local vicinity.

Another raptor of interest was a **dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk** of the Western *Calurus* subspecies that put in an appearance at the watch on May 15<sup>th</sup> and appeared to hang around for a few days even if appearances at the watch were few and far between. Weirdly I think I had a very similar looking bird on June 1<sup>st</sup> over the watch – was it still out there somewhere or was this a second individual?

May 19<sup>th</sup> had started pretty auspiciously with Evening Grosbeaks singing in the trees around the West Spit and swarms of Pine Siskins jumping out over the lake. The day ended again at Frisbee Hill with just myself and Shelly Rackovsky watching two **Sandhill Cranes (which helped push us towards an incredible 82 total on the season)** and two American White Pelicans as they drifted past us; incredibly whilst in the same binocular view! I think I might be safe in assuming that Shelly and I are the only birders in New York State with that particular claim to fame. Talking of weird birds at the watch, on the 21<sup>st</sup> I witnessed one of the strangest birds in a kettle of hawks that I have ever seen when a **Great Horned Owl** mixed in with the first treetop kettle of Broad-winged Hawks and TVs. Still not totally convinced why this bird decided to get in amongst the migrating raptors but its one of the most unusual things I've observed, and friends of mine have heard of.



*Dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk photographed at the hawkwatch on May 15 by Dominic Sherony*

By the end of May you are basically pretty much down to about a dozen species of migrating raptors – the vast majority being juvenile Broad-winged Hawks. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> we again connected with a nice flight of raptors totaling 4,148 birds. Things looked set for a nice movement the following day but unfortunately I was away in Connecticut at the time. Thankfully Mike Tetlow was available to cover the watch, and along with some early morning coverage help from Dominic Sherony and Steve Taylor they managed to snag our second best ever day record for Bald Eagles, which also coincidentally pushed us way up past our old season best record.

[http://hawkcount.org/day\\_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2013&rmonth=05&rday=23](http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2013&rmonth=05&rday=23)

A run of almost a week of northwest winds and even some rain pretty much killed the flight right up until the last few days of May, when we managed to sneak in couple of thousand birds out of the closing days of the season. The highlight of this late flight was getting to see a good number of regulars who stopped in at the watch to bid me farewell and count a few more birds on the season. There were a few emotional moments for sure over those days; I kind of felt like a retiring sportsman or something.

June 1<sup>st</sup>—although the watch was officially over and we were supposed to be spending a day relaxing at Hamlin Beach, after

*(Continued on page 5)*

(2013 Hawkwatch Season—Continued from page 4)

picking up another American White Pelican and some Red Crossbills in the pines near the lake watch, the burgeoning raptor flight meant that I couldn't help but head to the park to pick up one last flight. Though it was over all too soon it still tallied a decent 662 raptors on the day including **35 more Bald eagles, which pushed us up to an incredible total of 648 on the season.** [https://www.hawkcount.org/day\\_summary.php?rsite=353&year=2013&rmonth=06](https://www.hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&year=2013&rmonth=06)

The last day's flight made for the perfect end to a season, which though not perfect, certainly had a number of great and memorable moments. Though it doesn't feel like it every day (mainly the single digit northwest wind days) the unbelievable birding, and as importantly the incredible people, make counting at Braddock Bay a privilege. Thanks to Pete Gustas for putting me forward for the job, Daena Ford for taking a chance on me and all the local birders, BBRR members and volunteers who have become good friends over the years. Its been a fantastic three years and although creating a list always means that there is a chance of missing out people accidently I did want to say a special thanks to the following:

Mike Tetlow – without whom some of the biggest days literally wouldn't have happened. Catherine Hamilton and the Ossum Possum for putting up with me while it was miserable in March. Bud Morgan for being there with a joke whenever one was required. Bridget Watts, Christine Smith, Kathleen Dalton and John Bounds for turning up on days when they knew they probably shouldn't have, and providing company and humor when it was needed. Dave Tetlow for providing birding tips, some proper wood and keeping me in the worlds finest baked goods. Karen Crandell and Mike Hewitt for entertaining me and the dog while someone was living it up in Brazil. Ed Sailer and the rest of the volunteers who commit their time to making BBRR a success. Brooke and Brian Morse, and Mark and Briana Bowden and family for being good friends and the worlds coolest birders and finally thanks again to Daena, Randy, Emily and Ethan Ford for letting me become part of their family for three months of the year.



*Raptor Campers learn the basics of hawk identification and watch for raptors on the platform. Look for Raptor Camp 2014 to happen again next spring!*

