



2014 Hawkwatch Season by Luke Tiller, Official Counter

The 2014 spring season marks the 37th consecutive season that standardized hawk counts have been conducted at Braddock Bay. It also represented the 28th year that the hawk count was conducted by Braddock Bay Raptor Research. A total of 364.75 hours were tallied over 59 days (March through May).

Another impressive season is under the belt at Braddock Bay. Though not a classic in terms of overall numbers, it's hard not to spend time at the hawkwatch and not have some incredible experiences both with the people and birds that stop by.

Of course the continents' avian hordes all know about Braddock Bay –that's why they stop by in such big numbers ;) This year it was all about BBRR spreading the word to the human population of North America and that alone made for an incredibly successful three months.

First the group from the Hawk Migration Association of North America Raptor ID Workshop joined us in early April. As well as reuniting ex-Braddock Bay counter and raptor expert Frank Nicoletti with the watch, it also drew raptor fans from as far afield as New York City, New Jersey, Montreal and San Francisco. In just a week of hawkwatching, participants were treated an incredible 10,928 diurnal 'raptors' of fifteen different species. These included two dark Swainson's Hawks, Krider's and dark Red-tailed Hawks, and a Black Vulture amongst other great encounters. Everyone enjoyed a great week of birds but also commented on the wonderfully warm reception that they had received up at Braddock Bay. It was great fun to organize and lead this particular event.



HMANA Conference participants and a few young visitors enjoying a great hawk flight.

At the end of April we were joined again by HMANA members as BBRR was the host organization for HMANA's 40th Anniversary Conference. An amazing weekend of exciting and interesting presentations were topped off by a great, fun talk by birding expert and Raptor ID Guide author Richard Crossley. Participants from three countries and 15 states and provinces all came together to share their love, passion and insight into the world of raptor education and conservation, The conference committee was led by BBRR's incredibly hard working Daena Ford. Review of the conference here: <http://naturetravelnetwork.com/art-soul-hawkwatching-display-hmana-40th-anniversary-conference/>

As well as the great talks, we were even treated to a couple of decent hawk flights. Only a few witnessed the first flight on Saturday, April 26, wedged into a couple of afternoon hours between banks of visibility choking fog. That said, for the few lucky souls on the platform it was an impressive and exciting flight to witness, as Broad-winged Hawks dipped in and out of the banks of gray cloud whilst winging their way east. http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2014&rmonth=04&rday=26

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The Sunday of the conference was even more impressive. Though winds were from the Northwest, the historically magic April 27th proved good again as participants who stopped by the platform were treated to almost 5,000 birds comprising of 15 raptor species. Just another spectacular day on the bay!

http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&year=2014&month=04&rday=27

It wasn't just visitors from across the United States that got to witness the magic of Braddock Bay. We were also lucky enough to have Jonathan Meyrav and Yoav Perlman from the Israel Ornithological Center stop in for a talk organized by Rochester Birding Association (RBA) and then spend a morning warbling. They picked one of the better days on the season, and along with RBA Board Member Laura Kammermeier, we spent an incredible May morning birding and visiting Braddock Bay Bird Observatory (BBBO). You can read more on Yoav's blog here: <http://nubijar.blogspot.com.es/2014/05/usa-day-8-crazy-migrant-fall.html>

March

From the bird perspective it was not, as I already said, a classic big Braddock Bay season. That said there was a whole lot to enjoy. After being delayed coming across country by a winter storm (among other things), I finally picked up my first bird of the season a seemingly auspicious Golden Eagle. The eagle would be the first of 64 of

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Braddock Bay Hawkwatch Monthly Totals by Species—Spring 2014					
Species	March	April	May	TOTAL	Season Average
Black Vulture	0	1	0	1	2
Turkey Vulture	2938	17981	3659	24578	9735
Osprey	1	112	98	211	232
Bald Eagle	56	166	237	459	160
Northern Harrier	87	294	142	523	864
Sharp-shinned Hawk	44	2744	1095	3883	6245
Cooper's Hawk	74	190	42	306	554
Northern Goshawk	2	13	0	15	43
Red-shouldered Hawk	200	206	0	406	777
Broad-winged Hawk	0	10417	19856	30273	29265
Swainson's Hawk	0	2	0	2	1
Red-tailed Hawk	347	2046	331	2724	4328
Rough-legged Hawk	31	131	12	175	373
Golden Eagle	8	42	14	64	26
American Kestrel	18	230	26	274	606
Merlin	6	20	6	32	24
Peregrine Falcon	3	8	6	17	13
Gyrfalcon	0	1	0	1	0
Short-eared Owl	0	1	0	1	0
TOTAL	3815	34605	25524	63945	53679

these incredible birds, shattering our season record.

http://hawkcount.org/month_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2014&rmonth=03 Thanks to the Tetlow brothers for popping out to the watch on a couple of days to see what was out there before I arrived in town.

March was not an easy month to watch hawks. It combined poor wind direction and a biting cold that made life along the lake shore pretty hard going. That said there were amazing little moments to be had. These included six different Snowy Owls all being visible from the hawkwatch platform on March 10th. BBRR bander extraordinaire Tom McDonald was a huge part of the Project SNOWstorm Snowy Owl irruption monitoring project that has helped us learn so much about these stunning owls this year. Two Owls were radio tagged near Braddock Bay, and BBRR supporters helped secure the finances to tag a third. Read more here about Tom, the owls and the project: <http://underclearskies.com/2014/04/05/tom-mcdonald-bbrr-snowy-owl-guru/>

Almost as impressive as these northern wanderers were the ten or so King Eiders that seemed to be loafing off of Ontario Blvd for most of the month. They were not the only cool waterfowl to be logged over the season. As well as finding a hybrid Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser

(<http://www.bbrr.org/2014/03/22/hybrid-merganser-322/>), there was also the usual Eurasian Wigeon and later in the season a breeding plumaged Eared Grebe on the bay to be enjoyed.

There was a birthday treat, for me, in the form of at least six different Saw-whet Owls all being visible in Owl Woods on March 23. Even though we had to wait until the last day of the month, finally a decent push of hawks came on March 31st. The 31st afforded us nice views and photographs of a passing Northern Goshawk, and it almost felt a little like spring as the first Osprey drifted past the watch.

http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2014&rmonth=03&rday=31

With increased numbers of Turkey Vultures, it's almost impossible to equal our worst March count ever. However, removing the Turkey Vultures from the tally, we were there or thereabouts with our worst March of all time. Jerry Liguori still holds the record though – I guess he has to be famous for something in the world of raptors.

April

It wasn't far into April before we struck hawkwatching gold again. With a nice clear day on April 2nd, it seemed like the Turkey Vultures to our south decided to push north regardless of the winds. It seems that even with the wrong winds when birds want to go sometimes they will just push through. What was odd though was that they were right up against the lake shore on those winds. Highlight of the day was a gray/dark morph Gyrfalcon that almost took out a passing Canada Goose. Lowlight was not capturing the bird on camera, though there were two tantalizing reports of the bird west of the watch. As well as the Gyrfalcon, there was much else to enjoy: ten



HMANA Raptor ID Workshop participants with co-leader Frank Nicoletti (right).

Golden Eagle, eight Northern Goshawk and 161 Red-shouldered Hawks among the notables. It was also notable that we ended up drifting across to the marina to stay in touch with a flight that was almost out over the lake for chunks of the day. The usual thanks to Mike Tetlow for his help with that.

http://hawkcount.org/month_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2014&rmonth=04

I've already highlighted our amazing week with the HMANA tour group. It was about the only time we had cooperative winds all season. April 10th saw us add a Snowy Owl perched out in front of the watch, a second adult dark Swainson's Hawk (one was counted the day before), a dark/rufous adult Red-tailed Hawk, an adult Krider's intergrade, and our only Black Vulture (hard hit by a cold winter?) for the year. The good run continued through to April 14th and both Frank Nicoletti and some of the HMANA tour group were around to enjoy the extra days. The 13th and 14th saw us add another 10,000 birds: including an adult dark morph Red-tailed Hawk, a Short-eared Owl passed the watch on the 14th and an incredible flight of almost 2000 flickers over the day on the 13th.

Most of the rest of April sagged somewhat, though there was much to be done at BBRR in preparation for the HMANA conference. In the end it was an incredibly entertaining and instructive event. On the 27th it was hard to drag conference attendees away from the platform for the end of weekend events. It was also Bird of Prey days weekend and we were treated to beautiful weather and almost 5,000 birds of fifteen species on Northwest winds (not for the first time this season) a brilliant advert for the joys of hawkwatching!

http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2014&rmonth=04&rday=27

Though April 27th is magical (check the date for the two biggest flights in Braddock history if you don't believe me), flights on the 'wrong' winds were part of the overall season story. It was also notable that the lake was much cooler than it should usually be at any given date over the season and I suspect it was that that was causing lake breeze to kick in during days when winds should theoretically have been strong enough to hold it at bay.

May

May started with a bang. I think I had surmised that we were not going to have a big Broad-winged Hawk flight this season as we ticked over into May, and though we needed just a handful of Golden Eagles to break the season record for that species I figured we weren't going to have much joy with May birds. It just goes to show that even when you think you have Braddock worked out it can throw you a big curveball surprise.

On May 1st, promising WSW winds saw a nice movement of birds before the flight appeared to trail off in the early afternoon, although thanks to the hard scanning of Shelly Rackovsky we managed to relocate the flight and spend another enjoyable four hours tallying a flight that was again out over the lake and best viewed from the marina. Another fantastically exciting day at the watch which saw us smash through the old Golden Eagle season record and add eighty of their Bald cousins on a day that tallied a smidgeon over 18,000 birds. Just goes to show you how little I know.

http://hawkcount.org/day_summary.php?rsite=353&ryear=2014&rmonth=05&rday=01

The rest of the month unfortunately passed with little more than a whimper. Winds were rarely right during the day and when they were they were often wet. The big push of juvenile Broadies and southern Bald Eagles really didn't develop and flights often contained more vultures than the expected Broad-winged Hawks and Bald Eagles. That said there was much to enjoy including a very productive day with the boys from Israel, good times with old friends from Connecticut and return visits from some of the HMANA tour group.

End of Season Excitement

Though the season officially ends on May 31st, June sometimes brings the promise of birds. I was actually planning to head back to California later on the 1st, but had plans to meet friends at Hamlin Beach early that morning. Due

to having a really fun BBRR season wrap up party the night before, we awoke on the 1st in Honeoye Falls.

A few miles into our route to Hamlin I received a frantic text from Andy Guthrie about a Kirtland's Warbler at Hamlin Beach State Park. Long story short, after a couple hours of fruitless and depressing searching we tallied one very late migrating Rough-legged Hawk at the park and not much else. Luck however was on our side and as we were driving out of the park I realized the bird had been refound by Pat Martin. An amazing bird and some amazing final day birding with friends all highlighting what a spectacular place Braddock Bay is to bird. I used to always tell people the birding at Braddock Bay was like The Biggest Week in American Birding, but with one of the best hawkwatches in the country thrown in. I used to add that all we were missing were the crowds and the Kirtland's. Now it's just missing the crowds.



Immature Bald Eagle—Photo by Ed Sailer

With departure to California now delayed to the second I managed to tally a small push of Broad-winged Hawks and a decent movement of eagles and other birds on June 2nd from my house in Hamlin. With Dave Telow tallying at the park we added a good few birds to the season total and Dave was also out again on June 13th to witness an incredible 103, mainly southern Bald Eagles passing the watch. It just goes to show that migration doesn't end in May.

Words of Thanks

Thanks to all those that make being part of the BBRR team such fun. Thanks to all the local birders who came to keep me company – especially Mike Tetlow for all his counting assistance, to all the BBRR supporters and volunteers that make the organization and its events run so smoothly, but most of all to Daena Ford for putting up with me for four years and for all the incredible work she puts into this great organization!