



2015 Spring Raptor Banding by Susan Cotsworth, Raptor Bander

BBRR raptor banders had a late start this spring, same as the spring of 2014. The extreme, never ending cold left the fields at the stations with layers of ice to chip and snow to shovel in order to get the traps set. Once we were set up and ready to go, March continued to bring us constant cold, north winds and freezing temperatures.

Because of the harsh winter, Lake Ontario stayed colder than usual through the month of April, and kept fighting off any favorable winds that came our way. We had a poor to mediocre flight the entire spring season, and yet, we came back each morning with renewed hope for more favorable conditions. A bander's optimism is never ending.

And so, what is it that makes and keeps a raptor bander?

In the beginning, when you make the commitment to begin your training, your head is full of the romantic notion of being able to be so close to these 'Lords of the air' and to be contributing to important research that will ensure their conservation. Then the reality begins that it is not easy work. Studying how to identify the different species, as well as learning all the different tasks of a bander, and the intricate steps of the banding process is quite a challenge.

It can take 2 to 5 years of learning and gathering enough experience to finally earn a banding license. Days are spent in extreme cold to heavy heat, some of which offer empty skies due to fickle winds. Then there are all the behind the scenes jobs needed to be done. So why, you ask, do we trudge on, never allowing days of discouragement to alter our determination that tomorrow will be a better day? Because, each time you approach the trap with focused mind and careful caution you never tire of the honor you feel each and every time you remove the hawk from the trap and see this beautiful creation of the raptor world. You look in their eyes with total respect and understanding of the courage it takes for them to survive another season. You admire their grace as they soar in the clouds and envy their ability to see the world from so high above us. You record their data, give them their own identifying information and release them back into the winds with quiet whispers of well wishes for a safe journey. From the tiniest of kestrels to the largest of eagles, each is no more important or beautiful in their own way than the other.

The first hawk of the season in your hands never fails to thrill and the last always leaves an empty space until the next season. Perhaps one of the most important reasons to continue banding is having the opportunity to share what we so proudly have been given the opportunity to do with the visitors of all ages. They come to watch, hoping that their day will be a good day in the blind, and they will be able to experience the thrill of watching what very few get the opportunity to see and experience. This can happen because we offer what no other offers - the freedom to come whenever you please and visit us in the blind, to see the dance of the raptors as they accept a new day to fight for their survival. We love to see the smiles and hear the intake of their breath as we bring in a hawk from the field. The experience we offer has often sparked an interest in others to learn more about the environment we share with the birds, and have found the desire to protect it even more.

BBRR's Main Banding Station is open to the public, whenever a bander is present. Our spring operation runs from about mid-March through early June, and summer banding takes place the month of August into early September. Spring tours and demos are offered one day of the weekend. If you would like to bring a group of 5 or more people (kids are welcome, too) out to tour the banding operation, please contact BBRR at information@brr.org or 585-267-5483 to make arrangements so we may accommodate a larger number of visitors and ensure you have a valuable experience.

Spring 2015 Raptor Banding Totals				
SPECIES	March	April	May	TOTAL
Red-tailed Hawk	5	34	8	47
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	2	0	3
Rough-legged Hawk	0	2	0	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	62	49	112
Cooper's Hawk	8	11	6	25
Northern Goshawk	0	1	0	1
American Kestrel	0	5	0	5
Merlin	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	117	63	195