



2016 Spring Raptor Banding by Barbara French, Raptor

Spring 2016 began on a far more promising note from the previous two springs, as we were able to open the banding blinds much earlier in March and the process didn't involve having to excavate traps from the snow. In fact, the day we opened Main Blind (March 7), was so warm that we were setting up traps in short sleeves! Though that level of warmth didn't continue for much longer, and we got a more seasonable chill, it was a welcome change from previous years when we didn't open Main at all until late March because of ice and snow. Payne Beach blind opened very shortly after Main.



Northern Red-tailed Hawk (abieticola) - Photo by Susan Cotsworth

March was a light month for birds, as is typical of early days in spring migration. Early April brought some special visitors in terms of both people and birds. We trapped a beautiful Northern Red-tailed Hawk (*abieticola*), a color morph we do not see this far south that often. Frank Nicoletti and Luke Tiller led a raptor ID workshop in early April that unfortunately coincided with unrelenting northern winds, but we managed to catch a lovely example of a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk. Since this bird is a particular favorite of Frank's, this was a special catch, and fortunately the group happened to be nearby when this happened. We called them to rendezvous outside the blind, where Frank, the crew, and hawk counter Ryan MacLean were able to witness its release.

April remained slow, but then we were hit with a vengeance towards the end of the month and into early May when we had a dose of "sharpie madness". Against all usual wisdom which states we must have southwest winds to get lots of birds, Sharp-shinned Hawks (aka sharpies) were streaming in massive numbers on northeast winds. 86% of the birds both blinds banded this year were sharpies, and most of those were banded in early May. For every one we caught, five were bouncing out of our mist nets and escaping before banding (a typical issue with mist nets and sharpies).

The Main banding crew was also treated to long, low passes by juvenile and adult Bald Eagles during several days in late April. Unfortunately, these days never seemed to coincide with the days off for our licensed eagle bander Dan Niven. The most glorious of these days was when Dick Mather, Susie Cotsworth, and I were treated to a magnificent juvenile Golden Eagle passing close enough by the front of the blind that I almost felt like I could reach out and touch it.

During the later part of the season, we had a large number of visitors to the blind, including four third-grade classes from School #58 in Rochester. They were fortunate enough to have scheduled their field trip during the height of "sharpie madness". These kids and adults were treated to example after example of Sharp-shinned Hawks, both male and female, adult and juvenile. It was a treat to show them the differences between the sexes and ages, and the kids asked great questions. At the conclusion of the tour, two of the teachers adopted two of the hawks we banded that day – a boy and a girl. It was also fun to show them that great hawks do come in small packages.



Adult Sharp-shinned Hawk, captured and banded at Braddock Bay this spring, and adopted by School 58!

The number of Sharp-shinned Hawks fell off dramatically after the second week in May, but we continued some light trapping until the end of May, when both blinds closed for the spring season. After two years of long, cold, snowy winters with lake effect persisting well beyond the normal time limits, 2016 felt like the start of a

(Continued on page 2)

(2016 Spring Raptor Banding—Continued from page 1)

return to normal business and normal numbers. It still had the feel of recovery from previous years, and we’re looking forward to what next spring will bring our way.

In addition to the spring totals shown at the right, bander Tim Willis and trainee Jill Church captured a Cooper’s Hawk in January while road-trapping that had been previously banded at Braddock Bay Bird Observatory on 12 October 2012 as a hatch-year bird. In February, Tim also helped remove a hawk that had gotten trapped in a dance studio. Originally reported as a Red-tailed Hawk, it turned out to be an adult female Cooper’s Hawk. In addition, Tim also banded five American Kestrels from a nest box in June.

On April 24, the crew at Payne Beach had a very interesting sighting. A wing-tagged Turkey Vulture flew over, fortunately low enough to read the number and see the color on the tag. Bander in training Melissa Mance-Coniglio reported this information to the bird banding lab and found out that the Turkey Vulture had been tagged in Everglades National Park as part of a study to better understand how black and turkey vultures utilize the park. This research is being done to learn how vulture activity there relates to damage the birds cause to vehicles parked at observation points.

Spring 2016 Raptor Banding	
SPECIES	TOTAL
Red-tailed Hawk	26
Red-shouldered Hawk	3
Rough-legged Hawk	0
Sharp-shinned Hawk	369
Cooper’s Hawk	15
Northern Goshawk	1
American Kestrel	7
Merlin	1
TOTAL	422