

The 2017 spring season marked the 40th consecutive season that standardized hawk counts have been conducted at Braddock Bay. It also represented the 31st year that the hawk count was conducted by Braddock Bay Raptor Research. A total of 676.42 hours were tallied over 92 days (March 1 through June 5).

March

March came in like a lamb but the underlying tone was carnivorous. March total precipitation was 4.66 inches (normal 2.52 inches) and the average high temperature was 2.3 degrees below average. Most of the month was cold but will be remembered for a fierce wind storm on the 8th. Unaware of the destruction happening nearby, I was fascinated by the windblown, rainbow colored, water spray racing across the bay. The month was a slow one for raptors; and watching ducks and counting vultures were highlights. Only 3 full days were lost to snow or rain and 16 days had single digit or zero counts. The 1st, 7th and 8th were double digit days all noted for warmth and good southwest winds, with the afternoon winds of the 8th being too strong for a good flight. Other double and triple digit days were all after the 20th when mostly higher temperatures were experienced.



Turkey Vulture—photo by Kelly Wicks

Average high temperature: 40.7°F (normal: 43°F)

Average low temperature: 25.3°F (normal: 26°F)

Average temperature: 33°F (normal: 34°F)

Total Precipitation: 4.66 in. (normal: 2.52 in.)

Total snowfall: 32.98 in.

The 40-year average count for March is 4722 and this year's count was 4998. The last 11- year average was 5817.

April

April was warmer and wetter than normal with 4.95 inches of precipitation vs. a normal of 2.72 inches, and the average high temperature was warmer by 5.3 degrees F. Only 1 day was lost to weather.

Average high temperature: 61.3°F (normal: 56°F)

Average low temperature: 41.8°F (normal: 37°F)

Average temperature: 51.55°F (normal: 46°F)

Total Precipitation: 4.95 inch (normal: 2.72 inch)

Total snowfall: 2.52 in.

There were no 10,000 plus count days, but 10 days of 4 digit counts, and 14 triple digit days. April 4th was memorable with 6,263 Turkey Vultures, most coming in a herd mixed with raptors during the end of a rain storm. I was alone for the beginning of this and it was truly cheap thrills birding. The cavalry arrived in the form of Mike Tetlow. The first Broad-wingeds arrived on April 10 with a count of 190 and April 16th had the first big count of 2,465 Broad-wingeds. The month had 1 Black Vulture and 2 Swainson's Hawks and on April 28th a count of 6 Golden Eagles. This year's count in April was 49,021. The 40-year average is 30,163 and the last 11-year average is 44,500.

May

May was wetter than average and the average high temperature was lower by 2.1 degrees F.

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Average high temperature: 65.9°F (normal: 68°F)

Average low temperature: 48.2°F (normal: 46°F)

Average temperature: 57.05°F (normal: 57°F)

Total Precipitation: 5.29 in. (normal: 2.87 in.)

Total snowfall: 0 in.

May had a Mississippi Kite and a Swainson's Hawk but the big event was a total count of 700 Bald Eagles for the month. In just one month, the former season record of 664 was broken! This season's total was 1,094 Bald Eagles. Weather factors may have caused this onslaught, but I think this is also a result of the continued successful growth of the Bald Eagle population. Many of these birds were hatch year southern birds.

May's total count was 19,203. The 40-year average is 13,348 and the last 11-year average is 15,851.

June

The count was extended to June 5th this season. June 4th and 5th were damply overcast with zero birds. On June 3rd 120 Turkey Vultures were counted, setting a new record of 28,324 (the old record was 28,301 set in 2013 when the count ended on June 1st; I've heard rumors that the 2013 counter is engaging a lawyer).

Breaking down the days and hours:

This season's total count was 73,469.

16 days had 4 digit counts that totaled 60,546 (82.41% of the count total)

29 days of triple digit counts totaling 11,609 (15.80 % of the count total)

25 double digit days totaling 1,256 (1.70% of the count total)

16 single digit days totaling 58 (0.07% of the count total)

4 very long zero days

4 no count weather days

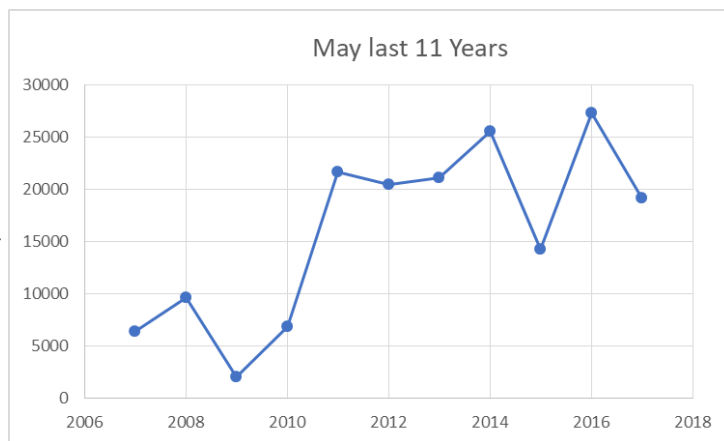
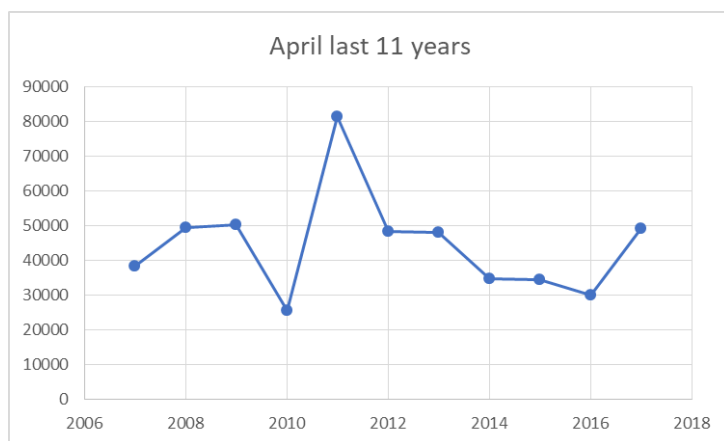
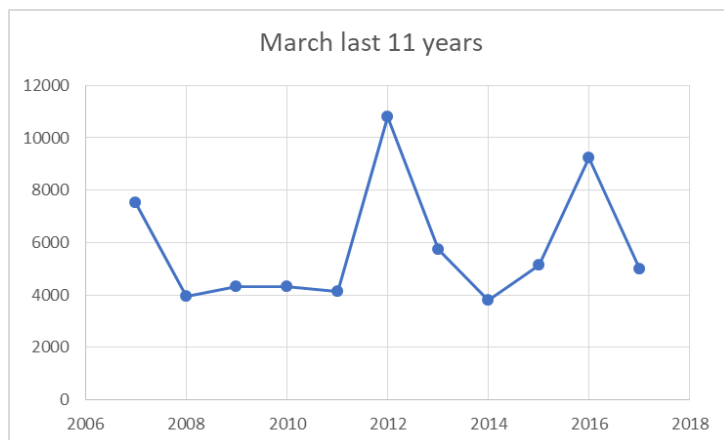
16 hours of 4 digit counts totaling 34,886 (47.4% of the count total)

104 hours of triple digit counts totaling 29,221 (39.7% of the count total)

Braddock Bay is a beautiful and fun spot to watch hawks and other birds and animals. I am grateful to all who chipped in at any level to assist the count. It was a joy to be here. May the daytime wind be always southerly.

Many thanks to the Oakawanda Wildlife Foundation for its sponsorship again this year.

Hawkwatch Totals—11 Year Comparisons



Braddock Bay Hawkwatch Monthly Totals by Species—Spring 2017						
Species	March	April	May	June (6/1-6/5)	TOTAL	Season
Black Vulture	0	1	0	0	0	2
Turkey Vulture	4124	19084	5116	202	28324	10964
Osprey	1	55	81	3	137	228
Bald Eagle	77	286	731	31	1094	205
Northern Harrier	99	317	103	1	519	840
Sharp-shinned Hawk	18	1874	548	0	2440	6022
Cooper's Hawk	62	297	37	1	396	540
Northern Goshawk	0	4	1	0	5	40
Red-shouldered Hawk	189	157	1	0	347	747
Broad-winged Hawk	0	25366	12374	6	37740	29347
Swainson's Hawk	0	2	1	0	3	1
Red-tailed Hawk	359	1244	403	3	2009	4175
Rough-legged Hawk	20	51	9	0	80	352
Golden Eagle	2	15	2	0	19	26
American Kestrel	34	238	18	0	290	582
Merlin	8	14	9	0	31	24
Peregrine Falcon	5	10	9	0	24	14
Mississippi Kite	0	0	1	0	1	0
TOTAL	4998	49021*	19203**	247	73469	54572

* includes 6 unidentified raptors; ** includes 4 unidentified raptors; RED text indicates new season record