

Taking Flight: News From The Ridge

Fall/Winter Issue | 2011-2012

Winter Forecast: A Flurry of Snowy Owls

By Erik Bruhnke



Snowy Owl, alert and awake at night - photo by Erik Bruhnke

The world of birds is ever-changing. The flow of seasons paves the routes for bird migration, which often takes place during the spring and fall. Those brisk late-autumn storms that come through the prairies funnel raptors towards Hawk Ridge. In the spring, intense bursts of southern, warming winds help spark migration northward into the boreal forest. There is another factor that comes into play with bird species which thrive in the boreal forest and northward into the far reaches of the arctic tundra. That sole factor is food availability, and bird-watchers and non-birdwatchers alike have been captivated by a winter phenomenon currently taking place.

There have been several bird

species which have shown up in impressive numbers throughout the northwoods this winter. The built-for-extreme-cold Common Redpolls have formed flocks by the hundreds, and made roughly the northern third of the Lower 48 states their home for the winter. Locally, here in Duluth and up the North Shore of Lake Superior, redpolls and their cross-billed counterparts; the White-winged Crossbills, have made their presence known by flocking to their favored food sources; paper birch and alder catkins (seed clusters) for the redpolls, while the White-winged Crossbills are congregating in the concentrations of tiny cones from tamarack and black spruce trees. In addition to these beautiful finches from the

far north, has come a bird species that is often associated with giving bird-watchers goosebumps... both by the unique beauty of the bird, as well as the cold conditions that one must endure to view this species.

This bird species' beauty alone is frosty, ethereal, and its body is clearly designed for living in the coldest, snow-swept regions of the world. This bird is a circumpolar species; that is, they are found on all continents throughout a specific hemisphere of the world; the northern hemisphere for this species. In addition to the physical and physiological build of this bird (hint, it is a raptor species), this bird is

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Notes From The Director

By Janelle Long

With the birth of my daughter this past August, I've been thinking more about long-term financial planning for our family. Being a mom, I want to provide that security for my children's future. I have that same feeling and concern for Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, as the Executive Director. At our most recent Finance and Fundraising Committee meetings, we have discussed the topic of planned gifts and other ways of giving. We are currently working on better means of communicating these options with you.

If you are looking to give a gift of stock or bond, listing a beneficiary on your pension/IRA or will/estate, interested in creating an endowed fund, setting up a bequest, we ask that you do please consider Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory. These gifts will help ensure the sustainability of the organization for future generations. We hope you find the stories and summaries enclosed in this newsletter as inspiring evidence that we are working hard to put your contributions to good use for bird conservation research, education, and stewardship. Please feel free to contact me directly at 218-428-6209 or jl原因@hawkridge.org, if you have further questions on how to go about doing this. Thank you!

A special thanks to the following grantors and sponsors for fall 2011 support:

Donald M. Weesner Foundation	Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation
Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation	(Biodiversity Fund)
Marshall Hardware	The Edge Resort & Waterpark (ZMC Hotels, Inc)
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Encampment Forest Association	(Lion Hotel Group & Labovitz Enterprises)
Erik Bruhnke / Naturally Avian	The Nature Conservancy (Cathedral Grove Committee)
Michael Furtman, michaelfurtman.com	The College of St. Scholastica (Bluestone Agency)

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Fall 2011 Raptors Raffle

The 3rd annual Raptors Raffle was held this fall to help raise proceeds to benefit the research, education, and stewardship activities of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory. \$5 raffle tickets were sold through the day of the raffle drawing on Sunday October 23. The drawing was held in the rain (for the 2nd year in a row) with about 6 people in attendance at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve.

Thank you to the prize donors, staff/volunteers for ticket sales, and all those that purchased tickets totaling close to **\$1200**.
Prizes and winners were as follows:

Prize #1: Duluth Pack Sparky Bag (Duluth Pack Store)
Winner: Seth Spencer, Duluth, MN

Prize #2: Guided Sax-Zim Bog Winter Birding Tour for 4
(Erik Bruhnke/Naturally Avian)
Winner: Paula Maidl, Loretto, MN

Prize #3: Eagle Optics Ranger 8x42 Binoculars (Eagle Optics)
Winner: Joan Stemig, Eagan, MN

Spring Count 2012

This March-May, efforts will be put forth to run the West Skyline Hawk Count on a volunteer basis. If you are interested in volunteering for the spring count, please contact Frank Nicoletti at 218-591-0174 or fnicoletti@hawkridge.org.

If you have any questions or would like to contribute for the future of the spring count, please contact Janelle Long at jloug@hawkridge.org.

Hawk Weekend Festival 2012

Make plans now for the annual Hawk Weekend Festival,
September 14-16, 2012!

Our social events will be held at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Duluth. Friday night we will hear Ph.D. candidate, Anna Peterson, discuss her research on "Mitigating Conflicts between Potential Wind Turbines and Migratory Birds on the North Shore".

Our Saturday evening fundraiser will feature a silent & live auction, and the popular "Birdchick" from Minneapolis, Sharon Stiteler. Sharon will entertain us from her repertoire of birding adventures. The full registration includes meals both nights, field trips on Saturday & Sunday, and admission to an "Advanced Hawkwatching" workshop at the Overlook. An optional digi-scoping workshop with Sharon will be held on Saturday.

Blocks of rooms are reserved for Hawk Weekend participants at several area hotels, including the Radisson. Details will be on our website.

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Help Us Meet Our Financial Obligations!

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory depends on the generous contributions made by its members and friends. You'll receive special member discounts and behind-the-scenes with tours as well as knowing these funds go to support education and research. Your membership contribution is tax deductible! Please make checks payable to Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory.

SEND FORM & PAYMENT TO:
Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory
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Gretchen McDaniel helping get things organized in the new merchandise trailer - photo by Debbie Waters

Advanced Raptor ID Workshop with Bill Clark

Hawk Ridge hosted an Advanced Raptor Identification Workshop this past October. This weekend workshop was taught by Bill Clark, author of the Peterson Guide to Hawks and other raptor books. The small class size allowed for a very personal learning experience. One of the participants gave this feedback on the workshop, "The Bill Clark class was terrific. We can hardly believe we had this opportunity to spend so much time with such an expert. Bill's knowledge of raptors is simply incredible. The classroom sessions were jam-packed. We have a much greater appreciation for the detailed drawings in field guides after hearing Bill point out the importance of the small details in each picture. The field trips and birds in hand were first-class. We wouldn't change a thing. We can't begin to tell you how much we learned and how much we enjoyed the class." We hope to hold this workshop again in fall of 2013. We thank Bill Clark for conducting the workshop and University of MN Duluth for use of the Bagley Outdoor Classroom.



Workshop participants (left to right) Myron Peterson, Harold Nordin, Edwin Longhway, Lou Albin, Karen Rylander, Bill Clark, Pam Albin, Molly Peterson - photo submitted by Bill Clark

New Merchandise Trailer!



We express much appreciation to the Donald M. Weesner Foundation for funding our new merchandise trailer and point of sale system!

We also thank Widdes Trailer Sales (Josh Widdes) in Esko, MN, Debbie Waters, Julie O'Connor, Harold Nordin, and other Hawk Ridge staff/volunteers for their time in helping customize the trailer and with merchandise sales.

New Hawk Ridge merchandise trailer - photo by Debbie Waters

Education Stories By Debbie Waters

As I drove away from the overlook on the last day of my last season working for Hawk Ridge, I felt an overwhelming mix of emotions: loss, relief, excitement and peace. With the retirement of David Evans (Fud), the hiring of Frank Nicoletti as our chief raptor bander, and my decision to leave Hawk Ridge, it was evident that these rather profound changes would mean growing pains for the organization. While the fall season provided its share of challenges, it also brought many triumphs!

One of the education department's greatest challenges from year to year is finding those amazing naturalists that are the heart of the main overlook. We typically have a large percentage return for several years in a row, but this fall all of their end times coincided, leaving us with one returning naturalist, (the amazing) Sarah Glesner. The search was on! Not only were we able to find superb naturalists Gail Johnejack, Jenni Polisenio, Margie Menzies and Tessa Enroth, but we also learned from our challenge and began a new naturalist substitute program.

Becoming a naturalist at the main overlook requires an overwhelming amount of training and experience, which, as you can imagine, is impossible to accomplish during our two pre-season training days. It takes new naturalists almost the entire season to really get a feel for the knowledge and bird handling skills they need to perform successfully. The "sub" program is meant as a training program for naturalists, where they can begin slowly, go through all the trainings with the naturalists, but with less pressure. This program will assure that the education department always has knowledgeable, experienced people ready to step into a naturalist role at the overlook.

The naturalist subs, as an added bonus, have a tendency to become addicted to Hawk Ridge and spend inordinate amounts of their free time (and not-so-free time!) helping out the naturalists at the overlook. This was fortunate, because the sheer volume of birds available for adoption and release this year far exceeded our naturalists' capacity. Thanks to all these hardworking, dedicated naturalist subs who made our pilot year a huge success: Beth Miller, Gretchen McDaniel, Katie Borg, Kaitlin



Margie Menzies (left) and Kaitlin Erpestad (right) teaching songbird banding - photo by Janelle Long

Erpestad, Matti Erpestad, Lizzy Schnabel and Jessamy Schwartz.

Matti, Kaitlin and Margie also were able to share another of their passions with the overlook visitors: passerine banding. The previous fall we had begun doing passerine banding several days a week at the main overlook. By talking with visitors, we had found that a major piece of our education program was missing—visitors get to see the banded birds and their release, but the catching and banding part was still a mystery. By conducting passerine banding at the overlook, we are able to fill our visitors in on the rest of the story. Matti, Kaitlin and Margie volunteered their passerine banding skills several days per week, and could often be seen with a crowd of kids and adults surrounding them, awed by the smallest of our migrating birds.

You should have seen a pattern in the above paragraphs. Part of what makes Hawk Ridge such a wonderful organization is the ability to turn challenges into opportunities. I have been fortunate to be a part of this organization for eleven years, and have seen what creativity and positive energy can do. I will bring those lessons along with me as I begin my new career as a science teacher.

I want to thank every single "Hawk Ridger", past and present. You have contributed to the success of the organization, and have enriched my tenure as the education director. You all have reason to be proud.

Wintering Snowy Owls at the Tip of Lake Superior

By David L. Evans

I've been studying wintering Snowy Owls at the western tip of Lake Superior in the Duluth, Minnesota – Superior, Wisconsin harbor area since 1974. My study area is about 30 sq. mi., or 75 sq. km. Excluding residential areas, which are infrequently used as habitat, it's closer to 25 sq. mi., or 65 sq. km. Useable habitat is largely industrial in nature, including rail yards, grain elevators, an oil refinery, an airport, and a variety of smaller commercial concerns. Owls with territories adjacent to the waterfront typically utilize the ice for daytime roosting.

Since 1974 I've banded almost 400 owls on the study area, from 0 to 33 per year. The majority of owls seen establish territories and remain

throughout the winter. Male territories tend to be more ephemeral over time, in part because of being evicted by new females. I monitor the study area on a semi-daily basis, recording and plotting locations of owls seen. I began using wing tags with unique alphanumeric codes in 1977, which greatly facilitated identification of individual owls for this purpose.

Territory size has varied with habitat and over the years. In the 1970's, into the early 80's, we had an exuberant population of Norway Rats and territory size was typically smaller with greater densities of owls in the rail yards and around grain elevators. Rat densities began declining in the early 80's and they were essentially

absent after 1983. I averaged 15 owls caught per year through 1982/83 and 8.9 owls per year thereafter.

Numbers of individual owls returning in a subsequent winter also reflected the die off of Norway Rats. Prior to 1983, 19 of 150 (13%) returned in at least one subsequent winter. After 1983 the number of owls returning in a subsequent winter was about 7% (16 of 231).

Sightings of wing tagged owls have also complemented normal recovery data. Owls from Duluth – Superior have been identified in South Dakota, Minnesota (7), Wisconsin (2), Illinois, Indiana, Michigan (2), Manitoba, Ontario (3), Quebec, and Nunavut.

Fall 2011 Hawk Ridge Raptor Banding Report

By Frank Nicoletti

The fall of 2011 saw numerous changes to the Hawk Ridge banding station. After 39 years of running the station, David (Fud) Evans retired from his post. I have taken his position as the director of the banding program. In so, I made several changes. To begin with, I incorporated my existing banding stations (Moose Valley and Paine Farm) that I operated for the past five years and put them under Hawk Ridge. Each station was operated by a trained and licensed bander and was also staffed with volunteers. These volunteers were an essential part of the operation and allowed us to run multiple stations efficiently without increasing the number of paid staff.

The 2011 season proved to be a productive year. A total of 4820 raptors were banded amongst the three stations, which does not include 57 foreign recoveries. Among the 4820 raptors, there were 1454 owls. Most of the owls were banded at the "Main" station at Hawk Ridge. The main station was in operation from 15 August - 30 November.

Moose Valley ran from 19 August-20 November while Paine Farm ran from 1 September -15 November. A total of 252 days were logged and the overall average number of hawks banded per day was just over 13. The flights seem to be consistent especially during September when 2294 raptors were banded representing 68% of the season total. This was mainly due to a good flight of hatch year Sharp-shinned Hawks. October was slower until the 11th, when we had a cold front that produced a good flight until the 20th. November's flight was good with a nice flight of hatch year Red-tailed Hawks (67) that represented 55.8% of the 120 hawks banded during the month.

As mentioned above, the owl banding was quite spectacular this season with 1454 owls captured, which is the second largest number banded at Hawk Ridge (1475 in 1995). The owl protocol was changed from previous years. In the past, a single caller unit was used to broadcast for owls with the first half of the night for Northern Saw-whet and the second half for Long-eared Owls. This season, I ran two caller units

that ran simultaneously during the entire night with one for Northern Saw-whet and one for Long-eared Owls. Owl flights were consistent during the migration period, although weather conditions seemed less than ideal, considering the large number of owls captured. There was no designated owl bander this season, due to budget constraints. The three daytime banders and volunteers took turns staffing as many of the nights as possible. We are hoping to hire an owl bander in future.

It is somewhat difficult to compare numbers from previous years, due to new protocols and additional banding stations, so I have included a chart to view each stations results and monthly totals of all stations combined.

Bald Eagles, a new record of 4 banded this season, in fact only 6 had been banded in the 39 years prior. Three were hatch years and the fourth was an adult. **Northern Harriers** were banded in good numbers this season with a combined number of 64, 48 being from the main station, which is well above the average of 23.8. **Continued On Page 5**

David 'Fud' Evans - Lifetime Achievement Award

By Jerry Niemi

David Evans, best known as 'Fud,' banded raptors at Hawk Ridge since 1972. His retirement from Hawk Ridge in 2010 represented 39 years of continued banding at the Ridge and in 2010 he reached the monumental mark of banding his 100,000th raptor! There are few individuals, if any, in the world that can make that claim. This included over 60,000 Sharp-shinned Hawks, over 8,000 Northern Goshawks, and over 20,000 Northern Saw-whet Owls.

From 1972 to 2010, inclusive, the Hawk Ridge banding station was Fud's home every fall from mid-August and often into December. It was 22/7 during those fall seasons – he would usually only take 2 hours off in the late afternoon to tend to personal business and touch bases with his wife, Molly. His dedication was extraordinary.

Fud's knowledge of raptors and the literature was immense. I know of nobody associated with the Hawk Ridge community that knew more about the details of raptor biology. However, you would never know it because Fud is a quiet, humble

individual, and not prone to brag. Yet, ask him a question about a raptor species and he will quietly tell you that such and such published a paper twenty years ago in this or that journal. You would not know this unless you asked him or worked with Fud.

Fud authored or co-authored over 30 publications on raptors. He co-authored papers with some of the top raptor biologists of the country, including Keith Bildstein, Bill Bowerman, Fran Hammerstrom, Pat Redig, and Bob Rosenfield. He co-wrote the Birds of North America document for the Long-eared Owl with Jeff Marks, Denver Holt, and Dean Amadon.

Besides his 39 years of banding activities at Hawk Ridge, Fud was involved with raptors throughout the year. If you wanted to know about Peregrine Falcons in the area – ask Fud. If the federal government or state agencies wanted someone to climb to the nest of a Bald Eagle or Osprey, they called Fud. Recently he has been traversing the landscape of Wisconsin on the lookout for nesting Northern Goshawk for the Wisconsin DNR. He was constantly answering

questions about raptors. Few knew that he has been assessing populations and movements of Snowy Owls for over 20 years in the Duluth-Superior Harbor. I had the pleasure of joining Fud on one of his afternoon "Snowy Owl Tours" – an amazing journey through the maze of back roads and alleyways in the Duluth-Superior area.

At Hawk Ridge Weekend on September 17, 2011, Fud was presented the Lifetime Achievement Award for his dedication and extensive efforts at Hawk Ridge. On October 8, 2011 at the banquet of the Annual Meeting of the Raptor Research Foundation held in Duluth, Fud was again presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award by his long-term colleague, Dr. Robert Rosenfield, now Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. Fud mentored Bob early in his career and was instrumental in Bob's rise as a preeminent raptor scientist today. The applause and standing ovation were a touching moment and an absolutely appropriate salutation to the lifetime achievements of David 'Fud' Evans.



Bob Rosenfield (left) presenting David 'Fud' Evans Lifetime Achievement award (center) with Dr. Jerry Niemi (right) - photo by Wayne Nelson

Raptor Research Foundation Conference 2011

In October 2011, Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory co-hosted the annual meeting of the Raptor Research Foundation here in Duluth. The Raptor Research Foundation (RRF) is a non-profit scientific society with 1,000+ members in over 50 countries. RRF's primary goal is the accumulation and dissemination of scientific information about raptors (hawks, eagles, falcons and owls). This information is used to inform the public (both scientific and lay) about the role of raptors in nature, and to promote the conservation of raptors whose populations are threatened by human activities.

Over 100 RRF members presented their most recent work in raptor research and discussed issues that may impact raptors in the future. These scientists have their finger on the pulse of the state of raptors worldwide and they are proactively examining our changing world to protect birds of prey and their habitat. Climate, water, toxins, habitat loss, chemical production/use, water, and



Gene Jacobs teaching students at Early Careers in Raptor Research workshop how to prepare study skins - photo by Dan Varland

new energy development are just a few of the critical issues facing our planet. These researchers are working tirelessly to blend new development with safe practices for raptors and the ecosystems in which they thrive.

The conference also had a poster session, six different symposia on raptor-related issues, social events, field trips and a silent auction. 230 people attended the conference, from 5 countries, 34 U.S. states and 6 Canadian Provinces.

Sharp-shinned Hawk totals were encouraging considering the past decade of lower than normal numbers. A combined total of 2642 were banded, 1651 at the main station, which is slightly above the average of 1561. We had three returns, one each from 2010, 2005 and 2003. **Cooper's Hawks** were banded in good numbers, 49, including 33 at the main station. This is a good number considering that only 133 were counted from the overlook. We had one return banded as a hatch year on 13 October 2006 and recaptured on 16 October 2011. **Northern Goshawk** at 129 was better than expected, again considering that only 231 were counted from the overlook. The age and sex breakdown is as follows: 90 hatch-year males (70%), 25 hatch year females (19%), 6 second year males, 5 second year females and 3 after-second year males.

Broad-winged Hawk was well represented with a combined 18 banded, 8 at the main station, which is one below the average of 9. Of these, 6 were adults and 12 hatch years. It was an above average year for **Red-tailed hawks** counted at the overlook (7,310). We banded 290, 124 at the main station, which is above the average of 82. We had one return, a hatch year banded on 23 October 2006 and recaptured on 17 October 2011. Of the 290 banded, two were rufous morph and one light Harlan's, all hatch year. **Rough-legged Hawk** at 12 banded, 9 from the main station, which is slightly above the average of 7. All were hatch year birds, 11 lights and one dark morph.

The falcon numbers were quite varied. **American Kestrel** at 62 banded seemed lower than expected considering the numbers counted. There were only 31 banded at the Main station, which is below the average of 41. **Merlin** numbers were good with 91 banded, which represent 42% of the numbers counted at the overlook. 49 were banded at the main station. **Peregrine Falcon** numbers were low with 5 banded. Last year there were 11 banded between

all three stations. Of the 5, one was an adult female.

North-ern Saw-whet Owl numbers were surprisingly high this season with 1355 captured including 45 encounters (already banded). 41 were foreign recoveries and 4 returns that were banded last fall at Hawk Ridge. This total is only second to 1995 seasons of 1402. The age ratio was 814 (62%) after-hatch years and 492 (38%) hatch year and there were four birds aged as unknown. There were a high percentage of birds showing second year molt pattern, indicating that many of the 2010 owls survived. **Long-eared Owls** were recorded in good numbers with a combined total of 134, 120 at the main station which is the 5th highest number banded there and is double the average of 59. **Barred Owls** had a record year with 10 banded, which includes 1 banded at Paine Farm.

There were a number of foreign recoveries this season. Among the 45 Northern Saw-whets, we have information on 20 that are mainly from the other banding areas including: 7 from Wisconsin, 1 from Whitefish Point, Michigan, 8 from Minnesota, 3 from Ontario, 2 from Thunder Cape, Ontario and 1 from Long Point near Lake Erie. We had five Sharp-shinned Hawks, 1 from Knife River, Minnesota from 2010, 1 from Whitefish Point, Michigan from May 2011, and 3 from Thunder Cape, Ontario, 2 from August 2011 and 1 from September 2010. A Northern Harrier banded at Whitefish Point, Michigan in 2003 as an adult was recaptured here in November 2011. A banded



Karen Stubenvoll releasing a Bald Eagle - photo by Gretchen McDaniel

Peregrine Falcon from the Twin Cities was also recaptured at Hawk Ridge in October.

Thank you so much to my fellow banders, Nova Mackentley, Chris Neri and David Alexander. I would also like to thank the numerous volunteers and others that helped in many ways, including: Karen Stubenvoll, Annmarie Geniusz, Tara Haynes, Todd Burnside, Jessamy Schwartz, Stephen Bockhold, Karl Bardon, Cory Ritter, Jane Hosking, Andrew Longtin, Christina Tarasczuk, David Carman, all the education staff and volunteers, the Hawk Ridge Stewardship Committee including Bob Owens, Tim Bates and Judy Gibbs, the MN Conservation Corps (MCC) crew that helped clear brush and helped take the blind out. Many others helped in different ways including Dick Green, Adeline Nunez, Peder Svingen, Ben Yokel, Eric Helland, Wade, Rich Melcher, and Mary Normandia. I would especially like to thank my wife, Kate Nicoletti, for all her help and support. Finally, thanks to all those who supported the research through their contributions, including the adopt-a-raptor program.

Family Owl Banding Experience By Karen Stubenvoll

On October 20, local author, Sarah Seidelmann MD (What the Walrus Knows: An Eccentric's Field Guide to working with Beastie Energies), brought her family to the Hawk Ridge banding station for a magical night with Northern Saw-whet Owls. The winning bidder for the "Family Owl Banding Experience", Sarah was accompanied by her husband Dr. Mark Seidelmann, falconer Dr. Ben Rice, and 3 children. They were met at the trailhead by Hawk Ridge Board

Chair and banding volunteer, Karen Stubenvoll, and staff raptor bander, Chris Neri, who, to their delight, quickly pointed out a tiny saw-whet perched in a tree. A visit into the banding station followed, where staff raptor bander, Nova Mackentley, was ready to band the first saw-whet of the evening.

Sarah wrote, "It's hard to describe the sweetness of saw-whets -- it's like they are full of wonder and innocence and yet fearless. The

naturalists kindly showed all of us the different kinds of feathers they have, how they estimate their age and we were allowed to touch their exquisitely soft feathers. Cashmere has nothing on these sweet Beasties!"

Each visitor released a saw-whet back into the wild, and one by one watched them silently flutter away into the night. To arrange an Owl Banding Experience for your family or civic group, contact Janelle Long at jlong@hawkridge.org.

Sax-Zim Bog Winter Birding Tour

On Saturday, January 28, Amy and Tom from Wisconsin, the winning bidders at our Hawk Weekend fundraising auction, enjoyed an exciting guided field trip at the Sax-Zim

Bog. They were led to an amazing day of wildlife by Hawk Ridge banding director, Frank Nicoletti. This included 8 new life-list birds for Amy and Tom, plus good views of two moose on Admiral Road! Other highlights of the trip included

Black-backed Woodpecker, Hoary Redpoll, Evening Grosbeaks, and Boreal Chickadees. A Snowy Owl was also spotted in town. A special thank you goes to Frank for donating his time and expertise.

Western Great Lakes Owl Monitoring Project

By Dave Grosshuesch

This was the seventh year of a collaborative partnership between the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory (HRBO), Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI), MN-Dept. of Nat. Res. (MN-DNR), and the WI Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI) to monitor owl populations in the western Great Lakes region. However, it's the 138 volunteers willing to spend an evening or more listening for owls that make the survey successful! Participants survey their route once between April 1 and April 15 listening for five minutes per station to the wonderful night-time sounds.

The objectives of this survey are to: 1) understand the distribution and abundance of owl species in the region, 2) determine trends in the relative abundance of owls in the region, 3) determine if trends are comparable in surrounding areas and analyze whether these trends could be scaled up or down on the landscape, and 4) determine if there are habitat associations of owl species in the region.

2011 marked one of the best owl survey seasons to date, based on the number of owls detected. The overall mean number of owls per route for both states combined (2.17) was the highest in survey history. In total, 379 owls of six species were recorded on 108 routes. The top five owl species combined between Minnesota and Wisconsin were Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl,

Northern Saw-whet Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, and Long-eared Owl, respectively. In Minnesota, Great Horned Owls and Eastern Screech Owls were recorded in record high numbers, Barred Owls were near record high, and N. Saw-whet Owls were second only to 2006.

Partners in the Western Great Lakes Region Owl Survey received a grant in 2012 to conduct detailed analyses of all years' data prior to the 2013 field season. This analysis will include calculations of detection probabilities, assessment of variables affecting detectability, a power analysis to determine the level of survey effort required to detect trends, and a revised evaluation of population indices and trends. In addition to data analyses done, we would like to begin a pilot survey using playbacks to survey for uncommon or hard-to-detect species such as Eastern Screech Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Great Gray Owl, and Boreal Owl.

Thanks again to all those that participated in the 2011 Owl Survey! If you are interested in participating in the Owl Monitoring Survey in Minnesota, please contact Julie O'Connor (218.348.2291 or joconnor@hawkridge.org). To find more details about the survey and to read the full 2011 report, go to the Hawk Ridge website at: www.hawkridge.org/research/springowl.html.

sive year for Snowy Owls up in the tundra. Breeding success was noteworthy (in a positive way), and as a result of such great nesting success occurring, there was an explosion of Snowy Owl chicks that suddenly began to "crowd" the arctic tundra, speaking in terms of raptors and their territories. As I'm typing this story of Snowy Owls, lemming populations are still doing well up in the tundra; but since this past November, record numbers of Snowy Owls have come down into America to spend their winter months.

Snowy Owls have been making news throughout the nation, from newspaper headlines, blogs, and even large-scale nightly news broadcasts. This winter is likely going to be one of the most noteworthy times to view Snowy Owls in our lifetime. To look for Snowy Owls where you live, check out areas that resemble their arctic habitat that I mentioned earlier on. Snowy Owls love to perch on snow bales, flat rooftops, railings overlooking hillsides, etc. The big thing is, look where these white fluffballs of the north can find a good place to perch, which overlooks a good mouse-hunting area. It is also



Common Redpolls flocking for the winter months - photo by Erik Bruhnke

good to note that although Snowy Owls have been found throughout the inland states this winter, the most likely areas you are to see a Snowy Owl will be within the rough vicinity of large bodies of water, such as the Great Lakes region, or along the West Coast or East Coast. Regardless of where you are, I wish you luck in finding these beautiful arctic birds. Over the next month or so, they will

be heading back up north to return to the flat, brisk expanse of land they call home.

Encampment Forest Bird Banding Project By Annie Bracey

The HRBO Research Committee has a long term goal of studying the bird migration on the North Shore of Lake Superior. This report by Annie Bracey (Hawk Ridge) and Peter Harris (Wolf Ridge ELC) is a small part of that activity. Encampment Forest Bird Banding Project, Lake County, MN

During the fall of 2011, researchers set up a banding station within the Encampment Forest as a way to sample to migratory bird population moving along the north shore of Lake Superior. The study was designed to 1) capture the movements of non-raptorial birds (primarily songbirds) within the Encampment Forest, 2) record demographic information for each individual bird captured, 3) determine whether there were differences in capture rates between nets located near the ridgeline verses nets located near the shoreline, and 4) provide an educational experience for residents of the Encampment Forest, by offering a close-up view and discussion of the birds migrating through the area,

particularly for those species captured. The Encampment Forest was a desirable banding location because of the diverse habitat types available to migrating birds and because of its proximity to Lake Superior. During the four day effort, a total of 15 species and 34 individual birds

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Lori Walewski (left) teaching visitors about Passerine banding - photo by Annie Bracey

Live Your Life Like a Movie! Birdathon 2012

Who loved the film "The Big Year"? I know I did! The opening night audience at the Zinema in Duluth was a shoulder-to-shoulder crowd of Hawk Ridge regulars mingling with Duluth Audubon members. We all could identify with the character's quest for a Snowy Owl, and the birding hot-spots of Duluth, MN and the Sax-Zim Bog (just north of Duluth) that were featured prominently in the story.

Now, by participating in the 26th Annual St. Louis County Birdathon, Saturday May 19, is your chance to have a "Big Year" experience for 24 hours! The Birdathon is our spring-time Hawk Ridge fundraiser event. Previous years' winners have gone on for big careers in Birdathon circles (see Friends of Sax-Zim Bog "BRRRRDathon" results), and have even been featured in documentaries, such as "Ghost Bird".

This year, you can join a team led by an experienced birder, depending on space available, so get your registration and pledges in early! You can compete in categories, including the St. Louis County Big Day, the Big Sit, the Non-Motorized Division, Youth, or Township. The overall winning team will receive the coveted traveling Owl Trophy at the compilation brunch held at Hartley Nature Center on Sunday May 20. Prizes will also be awarded for winners of each category.

Details can be found on our website at www.hawkridge.org/events/birdathon.html. For more information about joining a team, please contact kstubenvoll@hawkridge.org. Proceeds benefit the Hawk Ridge education programs.



Snowy Owl in the Duluth Harbor - photo by Erik Bruhnke

only found in the lower 48 states during the winter months. This bird that is sparking avian awe & interest all over America this winter is the Snowy Owl.

The Snowy Owl is the heaviest owl in North America. They are a very densely-built species, with white, downy feathers surrounding much of their body, including all the way down their legs and even the soles of their feet. All Snowy Owls have rich-yellow eyes, with a dark bill that is mostly submersed in beautiful, frosty fluff that coats and protects their faces. Adult males are the palest of the ages and genders of Snowy Owls. Adult males can be pure white from head to toe. Immature males and adult females are beautifully-marked in black horizontal bars stacked throughout their mostly-white feathers. The immature female Snowy Owls are the darkest, often appearing sooty overall from a distance, and can look like they have more black than white throughout their barred chests, dark-mottled wings and speckled faces & heads.

Unlike many

species of owls that find their home-sweet-home habitat deep in the forests, Snowy Owls come from a land of bitter cold, cliffs shooting out along bluffs, and flat, treeless expanses. This unique region of the world, called the arctic tundra, is just what Snowy Owls need to thrive. Snowy Owls are ground-nesting birds, laying their eggs within a slightly sheltered "scrape" in the ground, and during their incubation will fiercely defend their nest from animals as large as arctic foxes and wolves!

The cold, windswept conditions that exist within the arctic tundra prevent trees from ever sprouting and taking-root. Patches of hardy grasses can be found throughout

the tundra. These little windbreaks, as well as brief undulations that exist within the vast reaches of the tundra, are home to the Snowy Owls' preferred food source; the lemming. Lemmings are small rodents that thrive

within the arctic, and these little mammals can make up as much as 90% of the Snowy Owls' diet! Snowy Owls that live near the coastal regions of the tundra will feed on waterfowl and fish too, while more inland-dwelling Snowy Owls will feed on snowshoe hare. By far though, the lemmings are the key for the livelihood of Snowy Owls. Lemmings, being holding a very "basic" position on the food chain within the arctic tundra, experience dramatic population fluctuations every few years. With lemmings making up such a significant portion of the Snowy Owls' diet, ornithologists have found that the Snowy Owls' reproductive success is linked to lemming populations for that spring/summer of breeding. In years when lemmings are abundant throughout the arctic tundra, adult Snowy Owls are not only thriving, but they are finding enough food to sustain their chicks on the nest; resulting in great reproductive success. During years when lemmings are scarce, parenting Snowy Owls could have a hard time finding enough food to keep themselves alive, let alone their offspring; resulting in low reproductive success for that season.

This past summer was an impressive-

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Sleeping Snowy Owl photographed through a spotting scope on Chequamegon - photo by Erik Bruhnke



Fall 2011 Hawk Ridge Raptor Migration Report

By Karl Bardon

Highlights

For the 40th consecutive season, a full-time raptor count was conducted from the main overlook at Hawk Ride Nature Reserve. A total of 70,757 raptors of 18 species were counted during 942.9 hours of observation. Unlike previous seasons, this report includes only those observations from the main overlook (in previous years a composite count between the banding station and the main overlook was tabulated). Although this season's total was 13% below the average since 1991, it was 16% above the average since 1972, and it was the best season since 2004. Many species showed their best season since 2003-2005, and many species showed a high percentage of juveniles, suggesting a good breeding season throughout the north. Highlights included an adult Mississippi Kite on 15 September, a gray morph Gyrfalcon on 3 November, and a record number of Bald Eagles for the second year in a row.

Weather

Fall 2011 was warmer and drier than normal throughout the season, with only one day lost due to rain (August 31st), and only 3.7 inches of snow (which is 12 inches below normal). This pattern held true throughout the entire season; for example, August was 2.5 degrees warmer than average, September was 2.6 inches drier than normal, October was 5.3 degrees warmer and 1.7 inches drier than normal, and November was 4.3 degrees warmer and 1.5 inches drier than normal. Other than accounting for a record high number of observation hours, the warm and dry weather appears to have had little effect on raptor migration.

Overall Results

August and the first half of September had good flights of early season species such as Sharp-shinned Hawks, American Kestrels, and Northern Harriers, but late September and October were relatively poor for migration, especially the last two weeks of October which failed to produce any good flights of later season species such as Golden and Bald Eagles, and Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks. All these latter species redeemed themselves beyond all expectation in November, however, with a record number of birds (6160) recorded for the month. No less than 51% of the Bald Eagles, 39% of the

Red-tails, 90% of the Rough-legs, and 77% of the Golden Eagles came in November, underscoring the importance of regular coverage during the month, which did not begin until after 1991.

Results - Species

Both Osprey and Turkey Vulture numbers were a little below average. A very late Osprey that flew by on November 6th was the first November report for Hawk Ridge. Juvenile Northern Harriers seemed to be everywhere this season! Of the 755 harriers counted for the season, 79% were juveniles, including an incredible 100 juveniles among the 116 total harriers on 11 September. This was the best season for harriers since 1999 (and 49% above average).

Sharp-shinned Hawk numbers finally surged to 19,474, which is the third best season ever. Much of this flight came early in the season when juveniles predominated, including a record August flight of 466 on the 30th, and a peak of 1857 on 4 September (very early), which is the third highest daily count for the state. Although we do not count the number of juveniles of this species, the percentage must have been very high. Both Cooper's Hawk and Northern Goshawk numbers were below the average since 1991, but still the best seasons since 2005, and both species showed a high percentage of juveniles (50% for Cooper's and 84% for Gos). The overall increase in Cooper's Hawk numbers was especially noticeable this season.

As with last year, Rough-legged Hawks also showed a good percentage of juveniles (30%), as can be expected during what appears to be the high point of their four-year cycle. The season total of 618 was 24% above average since 1991. For the seventh year in a row, Broad-winged Hawk numbers were below average without a significant September flight. These fickle fliers blow where the wind blows and even the lightest easterly breeze pushes them beyond the range of hawk ridge. Nevertheless, I am confident that perfect conditions will again be just right for a spectacular flight. The single adult Red-shouldered Hawk that flew directly over the counting platform on 6 October was well below the average of three.

Red-tailed Hawk numbers rebounded somewhat after four years of low numbers. The total of 7307 is the

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Encampment continued

were banded. Of the species captured, only two were non-migratory species. There was a difference in capture rate between the two major sites sampled, with a higher capture rate occurring near the ridgeline. Many Encampment Forest residents participated in the banding process and discussion of avian ecology and migration along the

north shore.

This was a cooperative educational study with Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory and Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center staff. Support from the Cathedral Grove Committee of The Nature Conservancy and the Encampment Forest Association is gratefully acknowledged.

Raptor Report *continued*

best season since 2006, but still 11% below the average since 1991. Most rewarding was the overall high percentage of juvenile Red-tails (32%), and most surprising was the large number of juveniles which came in November, including a peak of 235 juveniles outnumbering adults on the very late dates of 12-13 November. Interestingly, this high percentage of juveniles carried over into dark morph Red-tails as well, suggesting a good breeding season throughout this species' range; among the total of 72 dark Red-tailed Hawks seen, 29 were juveniles, a much larger percentage than I have seen previously. As is typical, most of the dark type Red-tails were birds of the Western race (*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*), but a greater number of Harlan's were also seen. Among the total of six Harlan's this fall were light morph adults on 24 October and 11 November, a dark morph adult on 20 October, a light morph juvenile at the Moose Valley banding station on 12 November, and dark morph juveniles on 26 October and 12 November. An adult Krider's was seen on 13 November and a partial albino (75% white) adult light morph was seen on 15 October.

It was also a good season for other dark morph buteos as well, since two dark morph Broad-wings were found among the kettles, and all of the ten Swainson's Hawks seen were dark morph. One has to wonder why so many of the Swainson's at Hawk Ridge are dark morph, since the easternmost portion of this western species' population (in western Minnesota) is entirely light morph. The Swainson's we see here are clearly not coming from the nearest portion of their range! The total of 10 Swainson's was well above the average of six.

What is the saturation point for the burgeoning Bald Eagle population? For the second year in a row,

Bald Eagles set a new season record, with 5688 individuals recorded, which is 84% above average and 25% higher than last season's record of 4519 individuals. A peak of 453 was seen on 25 November. Although Golden Eagle numbers did not break 200 individuals as they did the last two seasons, the season count of 160 was still 24% above average. Unlike the previous few years when very strong flights occurred in late October, this year's count was mostly in November, with a late peak of 18 on 27 November.

The number of Peregrine Falcons did not quite break 100 birds as it did the last two years, but was still well above average (41%), continuing a strong increasing trend for this species. As with last year, nearly half of all the Peregrines came in October (45), which is much later than previous years, when the October average was only 10 birds. Although the American Kestrel season total was slightly below average, this was still the best season since 2005, so perhaps numbers of this species are rebuilding after nine years of below average counts. The Merlin count was average with no significant peaks, but two Richardson's Merlins were seen on 29 September and 7 October.

Acknowledgements

This was unquestionably my best season yet at Hawk Ridge, and I have many people to thank for their help. First and foremost is assistant counter, Cory Ritter (aka telemetry man), whose unyielding work ethic and quiet enthusiasm certainly made him the best assistant ever. I am equally as grateful to my "team" of volunteer counters including long-timers Andrew Longtin, Dave Carman, Joe Beck, and Russ Edmonds who have all apparently be-

come quite accustomed to my idiosyncrasies. Jane Hosking continued to provide immeasurable moral and culinary support to the entire team of hungry counters, Stephen Bockhold, Peder Svingen, Kate Nicoletti, Chris Neri, Nova Mackentley, and many others also brought treats and helped scan the skies.



Karl Bardon (left) and Cory Ritter (right) keeping their eyes on the skies - photo by Janelle Long

Hawk Weekend Festival Summary 2011

By Karen Stubenvoll

On the weekend of September 16-18, 2011, visitors from near and far gathered with staff and volunteers to celebrate the annual raptor migration at Hawk Ridge. Our two largest Broad-winged Hawk days of the season actually bracketed the festival, occurring on Thursday, September 15 and Monday, September 19. Those who came earlier and stayed later were treated to some fine kettles.

Our Friday evening event was held at the Clearwater Grille & Event Center overlooking Lake Superior on beautiful scenic highway 61. Registrants were greeted outside by Red-tailed Hawk, Sky (with Joan Schnabel), Bu, an Eastern Screech Owl and a Harris's Hawk (with Lake Superior Zoo staff). A delicious pasta buffet was served, followed by dessert and coffee. Dr. Jerry Niemi, University of MN Duluth Professor of Biology and Hawk Ridge board member, presented a very informative talk on "Forty Years of Research at Hawk Ridge".

On Saturday, participants scattered to various field trips. Stan

Tekeila of the Twin Cities, our keynote speaker, gave a fantastic digital photography workshop in the afternoon. Dave Carman taught "Advanced Hawkwatching" workshops at the Overlook. Not many raptors were flying, but the crowd was enthusiastic all the same. The kids especially were delighted with passerine (songbird) banding that was happening at the Overlook. The highlight of the day for raptor banding was the hatch-year Peregrine Falcon which was displayed by Julie O'Connor, our Peregrine Watch Coordinator.

Saturday evening, we returned to the Clearwater Grille & Event Center for the social event and auction. We were greeted outside by an educational Peregrine Falcon on display with Erin Manning from Wolf Ridge ELC. Delicious hors d'oeuvres were served, and several visitors enjoyed a cocktail from the bar while browsing through the silent auction items.

After the meal & social time, Lifetime Achievement awards were presented for David "Fud" Evans,

who served as Hawk Ridge chief raptor bander for 39 years, and to Debbie Waters, who served as the Hawk Ridge education director for 11 years. The impact they have made on the Hawk Ridge research and education programs is timeless. This was followed by an extremely entertaining and informative talk by Stan Tekeila: "Uncommon Facts about Common Birds". Now we understand why his favorite bird is the crow!

We had a spirited live auction, thanks to Michelle Lee, of the Northland News Center, and her husband, Gary Kovanen, a professional auctioneer. The auction highlight was the bidding war for Frank Nicoletti's guided Sax-Zim Bog winter birding trip. With the close of the silent auction, we then enjoyed music by Mark Zmudy's band.

Due to Sunday's dreary weather, migration was essentially shut down. So, we reflected on our happy memories and made plans for our next visit to Hawk Ridge.

Non-Raptor Migration *continued*

3 Canvasback on 28 October, local Common Terns on the lake shore in August, 3 Semipalmated Plovers 27-30 August, 2 Sanderling on 29 August, single Dunlins on 15 September and 24 October, and six dowitchers flying by Hawk Ridge on 29 September (probably Long-billed Dowitchers), the first I have seen at the ridge.

I can say quite confidently that this was the worst fall migration for neotropical migrants that I have witnessed in over 30 years of birding. This impression was echoed by other long-time local birders. In contrast to the raptor flight at Hawk Ridge this fall, which showed a very good flight early in the season (especially for Sharp-shinned Hawks) and a relatively poor flight later in the season, the songbird flight was just the opposite a very poor early flight, especially for warblers and other neotropical migrants, and a very good later season

flight, especially for robins, rustys and redpolls. The total count of warblers this fall was only 7,884, in sharp contrast to last season when over 31,000 warblers were counted. There were also low numbers of other neotropical migrants, such as Swainson's Thrushes, Eastern Kingbirds (125 compared to 364 last year), and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (20 compared to 170 last year). Based on the high percentage of juvenile raptors recorded at the ridge this season, including Sharp-shinned Hawks, it was a very good breeding season for many species of raptors- so why were there so few songbirds? Since the sharpie flight was unusually large and early, it is possible they moved south so early precisely because of the overall lack of songbirds.

As with the raptor season, I can honestly say this was my best season yet for non-raptors. After

a number of years struggling with non-raptor counts solely from Hawk Ridge, I think we finally have the best methodology in place to capture the greatest number of non-raptors with the personnel available.

Now that the non-raptor count has become a part of the count research at Hawk Ridge, we think of ourselves as just bird counters (rather than just raptor counters)- a fantastic improvement, and the way all "hawk" watches should be conducted! I would like single out Jan Green to thank for her continued support, as well as Janelle Long, the Hawk Ridge Board and Research Committee, and all of the other counters for their continued help and interest in these non-raptor counts.

Comments From The Board

By Karen Stubenvoll, Chair

What a fantastic fall season we had at Hawk Ridge! Thanks to much hard work and many hours from our staff, volunteers, and board, we made 2011 an overwhelming success. One of the best parts was making so many new friends at the Overlook. Many of you have been following us on Facebook, too. Thanks for posting photos and videos to our page!

As chair of the Board of Directors, I want to especially thank Frank Berdan for his valued service to the Hawk Ridge board over the past 2 years. Although he has stepped down from the board, he will continue to help us with the Fundraising Committee. I want to welcome our newest board member, Martha Markusen. Martha is of Counsel with the Fryberger law firm in Duluth. She and her husband, Greg Smith, and their little dachshund, Judy, spend the winters in Texas where she is a volunteer at Bentsen State Park. All winter, Martha welcomes guests at the visitor center and helps them identify birds, then in March she is a volunteer hawk counter. We are fortunate to add her expertise to our board.

The year 2011 turned out to be fantastic for Bald Eagles at our banding stations. I feel very fortunate to have been present for two of them! On August 20, Hawk Ridge board member and volunteer raptor bander, David Alexander, captured and banded a hatch-year Bald Eagle at Moose Valley station. Then on September 6, chief raptor bander Frank Nicoletti captured and banded another hatch-year Bald Eagle at the main Hawk Ridge station. It was a highlight of my season to adopt and release this huge bird at the Overlook. Then on September 9, staff raptor bander, Chris Neri, captured and banded another hatch-year Bald Eagle at the Moose Valley station. Finally, on October 16, staff raptor bander, Nova Mackentley, captured and banded a 4-year old Bald Eagle at



Sarah Glesner (left) and Gretchen McDaniel (right) with eagle in honor of Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan - photo by michaelfurtman.com

the Paine Farm station. This was the first adult Bald Eagle ever captured in the 40-year history of raptor banding at Hawk Ridge. The magnificent bird was adopted and released by Hawk Ridge volunteer, Gretchen McDaniel, in honor of brother-in-law and other soldiers serving in Afghanistan. The moving story of the eagle adoption, with Michael Furtman's inspiring photos, made front-page news in Duluth.

As we look back on our fall season, and recall the many moments that gave us joy, I hope you will plan to spend next September and October with us up at the Ridge.

Gretchen McDaniel releasing honorary Bald Eagle - photo by michaelfurtman.com



Fall 2011 Hawk Ridge Non-Raptor Migration Report

By Karl Bardon

For the fifth consecutive season, a full-time non-raptor count was done at Hawk Ridge during the same hours as the official raptor count. As we did last year, we included early morning observations from the rooftop of the Lester River condominiums (near the mouth of the Lester River) to create a composite total of non-raptors. Since most songbirds prefer to fly closer to the shoreline of Lake Superior, the Lester River condo site was added to better observe and count this migration. Also, since the condo site lies a block from the shore of Lake Superior, directly in a southeasterly line between Hawk Ridge and the shore which is 1.3 miles away, it is the perfect site to do a composite count with Hawk Ridge. Coverage at the condo rooftop was generally the first three hours of the day depending on the number of birds seen. During September and October when Cory Ritter was present as the second raptor and non-raptor counter, he covered the Hawk Ridge main overlook, while I counted at the condo rooftop. We tried to avoid duplication by counting only birds nearest the shore from the condo, and only birds nearest the ridge from Hawk Ridge. Using this method, our totals were 188,220 non-raptors early in the morning from the condo rooftop and 132,407 non-raptors throughout the day from the Hawk Ridge main overlook, yielding a composite total of 320,627 migrant non-raptors passing by the Hawk Ridge area during fall 2011. This represents the best season ever for these non-raptor counts. This compares to an average of 146,000 from 2007-2009 when counts were done entirely from Hawk Ridge, and 274,162 counted in 2010 when the Lester River condo was added as a composite observation site.

Unlike last year when Cameron Rutt and I were often overwhelmed by enormous mixed species flights at the condo rooftop, this season I was the sole observer from the condo, but never felt overwhelmed by mixed species flights. Although the total number of birds observed this season was significantly higher than last season (or any other season!) the large flights of birds were more single species affairs. In fact, the greater number of birds this season can really be attributed to just three species: American Robins, Rusty Blackbirds, and Common Redpolls. This included a season total of 137,612 American Robins, which is four times higher than the average of the previous four years (from 2007-2010, the average was 35,430 and the highest season was 51,623 in 2008). Robins, robins, robins! Several huge robin flights occurred, including 39,127 on 9 October during light rain and fog, and 35,740 high overhead under clear skies on 12 October (only one higher count for the state of MN). Equally as impressive was the flight of 13,540 Rusty Blackbirds, during a NW gale on 29 September (which is well over twice that of any previous count for the state), bringing the season total of rustys to 23,860. Similarly, a

massive flight of 16,032 Common Redpolls on 28 October (a new high count for the state) helped to bring the season total for this species to an incredible 37,759, which is much higher than the previous invasion of 20,139 in 2008. The big question is - where did all these redpolls go? After mid-November, this species seemed to almost disappear...

It was the best season I have seen for quite a few different species, some of which are much less common here in Duluth than elsewhere in Minnesota. Although perhaps miniscule from a statewide perspective where tens of thousands of white geese can be seen, the season counts of 387 Snow Geese and 30 Ross's Geese were the best I have seen at Hawk Ridge. On 7 November a flight of 220 Snow Geese held 16 Ross's Geese, briefly reminding me of western Minnesota where flocks of white geese are often liberally sprinkled with Ross's in spring, but this is the third highest fall count for the state, and perhaps the highest for eastern Minnesota at any time. It was also the best season I have seen for Tundra Swans (474), including a peak of 161 on 8 November, many of which landed to rest far out in the middle of Lake Superior! This is unusual behavior for a species which gathers by the thousands in marshes of southeastern Minnesota at this time of year. Since the acorn-loving Red-headed Woodpecker is quite rare in Duluth (average only about one per season at the ridge), this season's count of six was a big surprise.

It was also the best season yet for Northern Shrikes (59 counted), including a new state high count of 15 tallied by a team of observers at the ridge on 21 October. Many other species have a history of record high state counts from Hawk Ridge, but have yet to be seen in such numbers from the ridge during my tenure as the raptor and non-raptor counter. For example, a flight of 125 Eastern Bluebirds on 24 October this season was the second highest state count, behind a record 167 from Hawk Ridge on 11 October 1999. The peak of 315 Pine Grosbeaks on 2 November this season was the highest I have seen (and perhaps the third or fourth highest count for the state), but well behind the 1025 counted at Hawk Ridge on 3 November 1997. Flocks of Red Crossbills totaling 56 birds on 2 November 2011 were the largest I have seen in five years, but nothing compared to previous daily totals over 200 from Hawk Ridge and the Lakewood pumping station. Perhaps next year will be an invasion for some of these species!

A juvenile Parasitic Jaeger harassing gulls at the Lester River mouth on 7 November was perhaps the rarest bird sighted this fall. A few species were added to my cumulative list of species for the Hawk Ridge/Lester River condo count, including

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Volunteer Voices

By Samiha Dib

Hawk Ridge. When I think of those words, I think of one of the very best parts of autumn in Duluth. I think of lovely, turning trees, beautiful views, absolutely wonderful people, and, of course, those incredible creatures that I have the privilege of learning about and watching... Raptors. I've learned so much in my time at Hawk Ridge and I've been truly inspired to learn even more and definitely do some avian studies in my lifetime! I find the fact that I can go and take part in this beautiful experience simply wonderful. Holding one of these live wonders and being able to see, up close, every detail and characteristic is one of the most amazing things I've done. Of course,



Samiha Dib with Northern Goshawk - photo by Erik Bruhnke

Hawk Ridge wouldn't be Hawk Ridge without the wonderful volunteers, naturalists, and staff members up there. It's so fun to work with them! I definitely value every minute I've had, learning from them, watching them do their thing, and just talking to them. They have this pleasant ability to brighten up any day!

I can't count how many times I woke up in the fall and said, first thing, to my mom: "Can we go to Hawk Ridge today? So what if it's pouring and cold?" It's one of the very few things in my life that will get me willingly (dare I said... eagerly?) up at seven in the morning, on a Saturday. And that means something!

It's been a fantastic volunteer opportunity for me, since I love birds, outdoors, being around people, and of course, those little dream-fulfillers like cash registers and price-taggers!

One of my favorite things about the whole experience is that, although (I admit!) I still can't tell many raptors apart, and I'm one of the younger volunteers, I was included in a bunch of different jobs. I loved that! The feeling that your work makes everyone else's jobs easier is a wonderful one!

Sometimes when I've gone on for the hundredth time to a friend about Hawk Ridge (guilty as charged... But how can it not be talked about?!), they'll ask me why I get so excited about spending my day watching birds, and I find it hard to explain to them... It's not about endorphins, like with sports. It's not about the feeling of accomplishment and success, like at

the end of a show you've acted in. It's a peaceful, calm feeling, like you're just chilling with nature and its creatures. It's like bonding with birds.

Aside from watching birds, I've had inspiration at Hawk Ridge for other things as well! My interest in photography spiked incredibly this past fall, as well as my interest in film-directing (funny, right? - well maybe not, since I was inspired to work on a Hawk Ridge documentary) and other things, as well.

You know, I feel like I should say that hanging out at the Ridge when I was seven, eight, and nine years old was much different than it is now, at fifteen..., honestly, it's always charming! Of course it's awesome to be old enough to actually, truly, volunteer and do jobs other than waving and smiling at all the visitors (although, now that I think of it, I still do that... Old habits stick around, eh?) I hope I can continue volunteering there for years to come. Yeah, that'd be pretty sweet.

I have so many good memories from the Ridge, from over the years, and I wouldn't replace them for anything! Things like, (way back when I was a wee little eight-year-old) standing with an extremely curious Saw-whet Owl that insisted on hopping from my arm to the top of my head! Or, ya know, showing up in a Rough-legged Hawk costume (this year) and having people actually be able to identify me! And even things like running birds to the Overlook. Or, hehe, asking the naturalists and other volunteers endless questions when there weren't many visitors... I was so happy that they always had answers! There's nothing like an answered question.

In short, Hawk Ridge is amazing and I love it. Forever. See you next fall! Good bird watching to you, all!

Volunteer Report By Julie O'Connor

The fall of 2012 was a gloriously warm season at Hawk Ridge! Balmy temps kept the overlook hopping with visitors and our overlook volunteers kept pace with the action, competence, warmth and grace we've come to expect from them.

Our numbers of volunteers are remarkably stable. Again in 2012, we had 75 active overlook volunteers during September and October. That number swells to 107, when we add in the behind-the-scenes volunteers that help with the count, office work, and off-site projects. We've gotten bigger, and we've also gotten better at recording our volunteer effort throughout the year. In 2012, our volunteers recorded 2587 hours of service at the overlook, and another 1150 off the ridge! The US Depart-

ment of Labor places a dollar value on each volunteer hour that can be factored in to the value of the organization. When we do the math, we realize that our volunteer hours represent over \$91,000 of in-kind contribution to Hawk Ridge!

We ask our volunteers to commit to a minimum of 24 hours of during the fall season. This year, well over half of our volunteers met that minimum; 42 exceeded it; 22 logged more than 40 hours, and our top 5 volunteers logged in a combined total of 720 hours!

In addition to what you see at the Main Overlook in the fall, our volunteers man booths at events and festivals, teach about Peregrine Falcons at Peregrine Watch, survey for owls in the spring, pull off Hawk

Weekend, serve on committees, work in our office, help with educational programs, plan and staff national conferences hosted by Hawk Ridge, lend their artistic talents to our projects, and represent Hawk Ridge to the community at large. Words are inadequate to convey the importance of these people to this organization.

Thank you to each and every one of our incredible volunteers. We couldn't do what we do without you; you truly are the heart and soul of Hawk Ridge!

We'll never have too many volunteers! If 2012 is your year to get involved, contact Volunteer Coordinator, Julie O'Connor at joconnor@hawkridge.org or 218-348-2291.

Stewardship Notes

By Bob Owens

The month of January picked up a nick name of "January", which was followed by February, which we could call "Februmay". We are enjoying a most unusual winter with temperatures above normal and precipitation well below normal. With that knowledge and situation, the Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve is experiencing changes both helpful and stressful. The birds in the area are enjoying more natural food with buds coming early, insects and rodent beginning to stir. Other wildlife, such as coyotes and deer, changed their habits making survival easier for deer and more challenging for the predators. The human use has also changed, as there are many more hikers, dog walkers, mountain bikers, joggers, birders with binoculars, camera-toting walkers and just fun-seeking sightseers visiting Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve, than we would normally see this time of year. We have fewer snowmobilers, but have had a few sled-dog hobbyists and cross-country skiers, as well as people pulling their children on sleds. We have even started to see

trail-riders get their horses out of the barn to enjoy the outdoors. The most important fact is since East Skyline Parkway has been closed from both ends, the park is getting heavy use from fun-loving outdoors-oriented families and fitness-driven people.

The local mountain bike group, known as COGGS (Cyclists of Gitchee Gumee Shores), received a major grant for trail construction in Duluth, of which a portion is designated for trail construction in the Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve for 2013 or 2014. This trail will be designed to have world-class views of Lake Superior, a range of difficulty, and be multiple-use for hikers, birders, and fitness training with little interference of current Hawk Ridge trails. They will review the final design with the Hawk Ridge Board of Directors for comments and approval. Some of our marked trails have been upgraded to be less invasive for erosion and gentler to the terrain. Additional trails are being marked for later construction to spread human traffic to a more

diverse area. The Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve was also blessed to have the Minnesota Conservation Corps from Moose Lake for three days of volunteer work. They enlarged the banding station area by cutting brush to make sight and access easier for banding research and educational opportunities. Brush was also removed from the road right-away for nearly 200 yards, eliminating the hazard of a narrow road to see oncoming traffic and people on foot. Several small areas, where invasive buckthorn was treated, will be followed with removal of trees, once they have been declared dead. Many other areas have been designated to be treated this summer and fall. It seems the invasive beast is multiplying; however, mapping and marking has made identification easier with the intent to focus on trail corridors and the core banding and viewing area this coming season.