

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory 2016 Non-raptor Report By Karl Bardon, Count Director

“The real prize for 2016 goes to the warblers, which shocked me by setting yet another season record of 78,297 total individuals.”

For the tenth consecutive year, the HRBO count team conducted a full-time non-raptor count at Hawk Ridge. For the seventh year, we did a simultaneous morning count near the shore of Lake Superior to give a more comprehensive account of the total migration. The results were 349,235 migrant non-raptors, including 221,170 on the shore and 128,065 on the Ridge. Although not on par with last year’s flight of over half a million birds, this was still a great season with many highlights.

Among the waterbirds, some of the highlights include a record season of 132 Greater White-fronted Geese. This species is normally very rare in eastern Minnesota in fall so the large flocks seen over Hawk Ridge this season were unprecedented. The record season of 11 Red-throated Loons included a flock of seven on November 2. A single Pacific Loon on November 19 was the third consecutive fall this rare species has been detected.



Flock of American White Pelicans by Karl Bardon

Flocks of American White Pelicans seemed much larger than usual this fall, and the season total of 699 is the best season yet. Two individual Great Egrets were recorded on September 12 and 17, which doubled the number that have been seen from Hawk Ridge in the last ten years. A flock of 96 Dunlin flying over on October 29 was an amazing record.



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher by Karl Bardon

Every year something new and surprising happens with non-raptors, and this year it was the amazing number of *Empidonax* flycatchers engaged in morning flight. In years past, I have seen only a few empids, perched in the trees or moving through the treetops. But this season I saw many empids flying above the tree line, sometimes high enough to be classified as “overhead,” which is certainly unusual

behavior for these weak-appearing fliers. On August 17, I counted a total of 178 empids, including 6 Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, 8 Alder Flycatchers, 110 Least Flycatchers, and 54 unidentified *Empidonax* flycatchers. The season total of 394 empids is more than all previous seasons combined.

The number of kinglets and Brown Creepers was equally amazing, though not unprecedented, since we also had crazy numbers last season. This year we pushed those numbers even further, with totals of 173 Brown Creepers and over 3,600 kinglets. The best day was October 18 when 613 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 147 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and 622



Golden-crowned Kinglet by Karl Bardon

unidentified kinglets were tallied, but an even better day for Golden-crowned Kinglets was on October 18 when 679 were counted.

Not to be outdone, the number of *Catharus* thrushes also pushed even higher this year. It was notable that the largest number flew by on the morning of August 30, much earlier than the usual peak in mid-September. On this day alone we counted 554 *Catharus* thrushes during the morning flight, nearly all of which were Swainson's Thrushes, but we also detected 2 Gray-cheeked Thrushes and 1 Veery. During the early morning hours before dawn on this date, the air was filled with the calls of nocturnally migrating thrushes, and I estimated over 1,000 Swainson's Thrushes were heard, plus 7 different Gray-cheeks. Although the number of thrushes heard at night always dwarfs the number actually seen during the day, over 1,200 *Catharus* were seen in morning flight this fall season, a record number.



Yellow-rumped Warbler by Karl Bardon

identified to species, and another flight of over 18,680 warblers on September 19 were also mostly unidentified. Other warblers setting new season records were 52 Common Yellowthroats, 170 Magnolia Warblers, 900 Palm Warblers, 15 Canada Warblers and 17 Wilson's Warblers.

But the real prize goes to the warblers, which shocked me by setting yet another season record, with 78,297 total warblers counted. Many more Yellow-rumps were identified than usual: the count of 27,688 this fall compares to the previous average of only about 3,500! October 6 was the peak day for Yellow-rumps, with 11,435 recorded, a new state high count by a wide margin. But note that the total flight that day was 19,465 warblers since many were not

I believe all these numbers represent very real and recent changes in the migration at Hawk Ridge. These massive warbler flights were not present at Hawk Ridge when I started counting non-raptors here in 2007-2010. The recent large flights of empids, kinglets, creepers, and thrushes are all species that were not present in large numbers when I started the shore counts in 2011-2013. In the case of all these groups of birds, the numbers in recent years are ten times higher than they were in previous years. Only time will tell how long these changes last.

Obviously, these counts would not be possible without the help of a many talented and dedicated people. Steve Kolbe helped with the shore counts, while Counter Alex Lamoreaux and Count Trainee Amy West were present all day, every day at Hawk Ridge counting all the birds they could find. Other folks who helped count non-raptors included Count Interpreter John Richardson, Steve Kolbe, Jan and Larry Kraemer, Kathleen MacAulay, Dave Carman, Stephen Nelson, Russ Edmonds, Allie Pesano, Ian Gardner, Andrew Longtin, and Josh Lefever. My thanks to all.



Hawk Ridge Count Staff and Volunteers photo by Karen Stubenvoll