

# TAKING FLIGHT

NEWSLETTER OF HAWK RIDGE BIRD OBSERVATORY



Beautiful Boreal

Photo by Frank Nicoletti

## BOREAL OWL THE SAVVY TRAVELER

by STEVE WILSON

*The DNR is proposing that the Boreal Owl be included as a species of special concern on the state's list of Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern Species*

Of the world's 229 species of owls, none are better at drawing a crowd than the Boreal Owls that periodically appear in the dead of Minnesota's winters. The irruption of Boreal Owls occurring as I write this is drawing hundreds of birders from all over the US, and even other countries. *What's the attraction?* As anyone who's ever tried to find a Boreal Owl can attest, they can be devilishly difficult to find.

Although they are the most abundant forest owl in Scandinavia, and their breeding range spans boreal and subalpine forests across Eurasia and North America, they are uncommon to rare throughout most of their US range, including Minnesota, and by their nature, quite inconspicuous.

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## BOREAL OWL: THE SAVVY TRAVELER CONT'D

They are religiously nocturnal, even compared to other owls. In one study only 3% of Boreal Owls observed on daytime perches engaged in hunting activity. And because they're quite small and roost close to the trunk of conifer trees, you're unlikely to notice them even if you do happen to walk by one.

In theory, one can home in on a singing male. This is easier said than done. They nest in the state's most remote, inaccessible forests along Minnesota's northern border, where many of the roads are impassable during the March to April singing season. And if you do hear one, seeing it can entail a hike-snowshoe-slog of a mile or more through remote forests in the dark of night, an unappealing prospect for many birders. To make matters worse, finding singing males has become increasingly difficult. I spent over 40 hours last spring listening along routes that produced dozens of singing males when surveyed in 1988-90, but failed to find a single bird. That's been typical of other formal and informal surveys in recent years. For example, the Western Great Lakes Owl Monitoring survey, coordinated by Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, produced only six Boreal Owl records in eight years. This apparent decline in MN's breeding population is one reason the DNR is proposing that the Boreal Owl be included as a species of special concern on the state's list of Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern Species.

Fortunately for birders, this Harry Houdini of owls turns into a bit of an exhibitionist every four years or so when they leave their breeding range in the fall and head south in search of food. This phenomenon, called a winter irruption, is a behavior Boreal Owls share with other owl species, Red-breasted Nuthatches, waxwings, and several finch species. Nomadic behavior comes with the territory when your preferred food goes through boom and bust cycles. In the case of winter finches, it's the vagaries of conifer cone and birch seed crops. For northern owls, it's small mammal populations, including Red-backed Voles, which tend to go through four-year population cycles, especially in northern boreal forests. Red-backed Voles are important food for Great Gray, Northern

Hawk and Boreal Owls, explaining the often coincident irruptions of these three species. The Boreal Owl is most closely tied to Red-backed Vole populations, though, because they are the predominant small mammal in the Boreal Owl's preferred habitat, mature forests. Great Gray and Northern Hawk-owls use more open habitats where Meadow Voles and other prey species are more abundant. And because of their larger size and more diurnal habit, both are more opportunistic (especially the hawk-owl) and able to take bigger or more varied prey than the Boreal Owl. Of the three species, Boreal Owl irruptions are most closely tied to the regular downturns in Red-backed Vole numbers.

When times are good and voles are abundant, Boreal Owls produce larger broods and stick close to home. When Red-backed Vole populations crash, Boreal Owls rear smaller broods and become winter nomads, rolling the dice that by hitting the road they'll find areas with more prey. Actually, this behavior isn't a complete gamble. Small mammal populations tend to

## NOMADIC BEHAVIOR COMES WITH THE TERRITORY WHEN YOUR PREFERRED FOOD GOES THROUGH BOOM AND BUST CYCLES

be less cyclical south of the boreal forest, so when vole numbers are down in the Boreal Owl's breeding range, they may be higher to the south.

As they move south from Canada and Minnesota's border region, many irrupting Boreal Owls reach Lake Superior. Like other migrating raptors, they're reluctant to cross this large body of water. In some irruptions, many birds remain on the North Shore, while others continue south past Duluth into NW Wisconsin and central Minnesota.

Snow conditions, as well as prey abundance, may affect how far they travel. Because of their small size, Boreal Owls are





Photo by Michael Furtman

not equipped to plunge through deep or crusted snow, like the heavier Great Gray Owl. One of their strategies to overcome this disadvantage is to look for opportunities where prey may be more available, if not more abundant. Minnesota's North Shore may provide these opportunities. The moderating influence of the lake can reduce snow depths immediately adjacent to the lake. Tight clusters of spruce, fir and cedar near the lakeshore intercept snow before it reaches the ground, creating "snow shadows" where the snow isn't as deep, and is less likely to form a crust because it isn't exposed to direct sunshine. Hunting from low perches under heavy conifer cover is normal behavior for Boreal Owls, so they're well-suited to this situation. Here, they can also take advantage of ear openings that are more asymmetrical than other owl species. One ear opens higher on the skull than the other, giving them an extra edge in determining the exact location of prey due to minute differences in when sounds reach each ear.

We know irrupting Boreal Owls often concentrate along the North Shore because they appear in the daytime, hunting or roosting in the open where birders can find them. They also appear day or night near houses with bird, deer or livestock feeders or woodpiles—all places where small mammals are more easily caught, including the occasional Northern Flying Squirrel -- for female Boreal Owls only. Flying squirrels can weigh as much as a male Boreal Owl. Female

Boreal Owls can be half-again as big as a male (the most extreme reverse sexual size dimorphism of any American owl), and can more easily kill the occasional flying squirrel.

While these daytime appearances are good news for birders flocking to the North Shore, the same can't be said for these "exhibitionist" Boreal Owls. An average of 75% of Boreal Owls reported by the public in six irruptions between 1981 and 2005 were found dead or dying, almost all from starvation. Most were found near the feeders, woodpiles, or homes mentioned above, or even in outbuildings, apparently catching too little prey too late. Unfortunately, this birder bonanza -- Boreal Owls appearing in places and at times not normally seen -- happens because they abandon their otherwise strictly nocturnal, remote forest habits due to hunger.

But if so many irrupting Boreal Owls end up food-stressed and starving, why does this irruptive behavior persist? Wouldn't they be better off staying "home," rather than taking a trip that could end in death? The suspicion has been that what we see during an irruption—food-stressed and starved Boreal Owls -- is only part of the story.

Several clues hint at the existence of a parallel, "invisible" irruption underlying the one experienced by birders. One is the exception to the rule; the 1977-78 irruption, when only three of 66 reports were of dead birds, suggesting that large numbers of

birds can survive irruptions even though some are stressed enough to hunt in the daytime. A second clue is the small number of otherwise healthy irrupting owls killed in collisions with vehicles and windows. Also, many irruptions are accompanied by an increase in singing males, presumably irrupting birds healthy enough to attempt breeding. A final, tantalizing piece of evidence was Frank Nicoletti's capture of 24 birds in the fall of 2000 during the first sustained fall banding effort using audio playbacks targeted at Boreal Owls. It implies that large numbers of Boreal Owls were present well before that irruption's apparent peak based on reported sightings, but remained invisible (i.e., nocturnal) until hunger forced some to hunt in the daytime.

It was the famous owl irruption of 2004-05, though, that finally confirmed the magnitude of the "invisible" portion of the

## THEY APPEAR DAY OR NIGHT NEAR HOUSES WITH BIRD, DEER OR LIVESTOCK FEEDERS OR WOODPILES—ALL PLACES WHERE SMALL MAMMALS ARE MORE EASILY CAUGHT

Boreal Owl irruption. While 72% of Boreal Owl reports were of dead and dying birds, similar to the mortality rate of previous irruptions, an expanded banding effort targeted at Boreal Owls revealed much more. Frank Nicoletti, now Hawk Ridge's Banding Director, assisted by David Alexander, led the effort, banding 268 Boreal Owls in Duluth. Dave Evans' (then Hawk Ridge's Banding Director), Bill Lane's (Tofte), and Denny Meyers' (Bigfork) efforts brought the total number of fall-banded Boreal Owls to 377, exceeding the number of birds (253) reported the rest of the winter.

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# COMMENTS FROM THE BOARD

by KAREN STUBENVOLL, CHAIR

Looking back on our 2012 fall season at Hawk Ridge brings memories of a sunny August sky, which brought a surprise visitor to the banding station – a hatch-year Red-shouldered Hawk! It was one of the highlights of our season at the Ridge, along with the appearance of a Swainson's Hawk in September at one of our banding stations. This year, a record number of Northern Saw-whet Owls were banded at our Hawk Ridge owl station. Then, when we thought the visitor season was almost over, an adult Golden Eagle was banded on a cold day in November. This majestic raptor was fitted with a transmitter by Hawk Ridge board member, Mark Martell, director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Minnesota. A crowd of people, mobilized by Facebook and Twitter, turned out to watch the release. At press time, our Golden Eagle ("Jack", or Eagle 53 as he is also known) is spending the winter in Ozark County, Missouri.

This season, it was also a thrill to see a Mississippi Kite overhead. And nothing can compare with the swirling kettles of Broad-winged Hawks in September. The fall passerine count had many record-breaking

days, as we watched Blue-jays and other songbirds moving through the bushes around Hawk Ridge.

We are fortunate at Hawk Ridge to have so many skilled and dedicated staff members who put in long hours counting or banding or educating the public. We couldn't do it without our volunteers, either! And being a volunteer is FUN. That is how many of us became "hooked" on Hawk Ridge. We are sad to say good-bye to our Operations Manager/ Volunteer Coordinator, Julie O'Connor, who moves on after 11 years at Hawk Ridge. We hope that Julie will come back to visit often.

## THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS WELCOMED TWO NEW MEMBERS IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS

**STEVE WILSON** is a retired regional specialist for Minnesota DNR's Scientific and Natural Area Program, and returns for his second stint on the Hawk Ridge board. His hobbies include studying Boreal Owl irruptions in Minnesota, and he is also a specialist in Spruce Grouse. His wife Mary Shedd is a biologist for the Forest Service. Steve is

particularly impressed with Hawk Ridge's outreach and education programs, and their ability to reach a diverse audience of all ages and interests.

**KEN ZAKOVICH**, our newest board member, is a native of Ely MN. He is the creative director at Westmoreland Flint, a marketing and communications firm in Duluth. Ken is an avid birder, a photographer, and a skilled artist. We are appreciative of Ken's expertise as we redesign our website and publications. Ken and his family live near Pike Lake.

One of the best parts of Hawk Ridge for me is meeting people from all over the world, including visitors who return every year for hawk watching, and also new visitors, such as Matias Juhant of Argentina and Slovenia who spent a month learning some of the intricacies of raptor banding. Hawk Ridge is one of the top hawk watch sites in the country, and I hope to see many of you at the overlook again this fall.

# NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

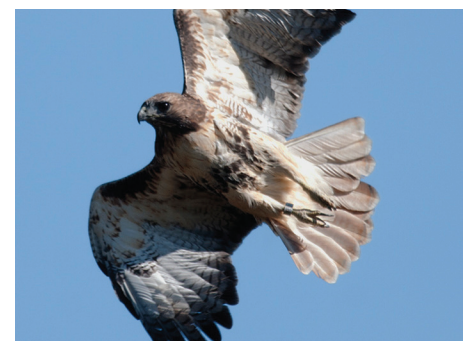
by JANELLE LONG

The past six months have been the hardest in my life, with the unexpected passing of both my parents. However, I am so fortunate to work for such a great organization. The support received from the board, staff, volunteers, and members of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory has been comforting, healing, and inspiring. I was blessed to have two amazing parents who always believed in me and encouraged me to follow my heart. I have been able to do this in my career with Hawk Ridge.

When my parents read the newsletters and annual reports, they would provide feedback, ask tough questions, and compliment the growth and successes of people and organization. They enjoyed hearing the stories I shared with them about the connections between birds and people through Hawk Ridge. Even though I will dearly miss those conversations, they will always be part of me and who I am today. I thank my parents for providing me the love and confidence to pursue my passion for the natural world and thank all of those involved with Hawk Ridge that continue to believe in me and the work we are doing together.

# BIRDBITS

Former Chief Raptor Bander, David "Fud" Evans, shared this interesting bird banding recovery tidbit. A Red-tailed Hawk, which was banded on November 3, 1986 at Hawk Ridge as a juvenile, was recovered dead on road March 17, 2013 near Shirley, IL. At 26 yrs, 3 mo., it's in 4th place in known longevity records for Red-tailed Hawks. The oldest known record is 30 yrs, 8 mo.



Red-tailed Hawk Supreme

Photo by Chirs Neri



# FALL 2012 RAPTORS RAFFLE

The 4th 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 until the raffle drawing on Saturday October 27. Thank you to the prize donors, staff/volunteers for ticket sales, and all those that purchased tickets totaling over \$1800.

## PRIZES AND WINNERS

- PRIZE 1: Duluth Pack Haversack (Jon Farchmin - Duluth Pack Store) & Atlas Optics 10x42 Intrepid ED Binoculars (Eagle Optics). Winner – Sandra Koslowski, Apple Valley, MN
- PRIZE 2: Guided Sax-Zim Bog Winter Birding Tour for 4 (Erik Bruhnke/Naturally Avian) Winner – Margaret Finch, Reading, MA
- PRIZE 3: Customized Hawk Ridge Fleece Jacket & Hat (Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory). Winner – Matthew Schaut, Minneapolis, MN

## HAWK RIDGE EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP WITH ST. MICHAEL'S LAKESIDE SCHOOL

by JULIANNE BLAZEVIC, FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADE TEACHER

Outdoor education is “a learning climate for the things which can be learned best outside the classroom.” The fourth and fifth grade students of St. Michael's Lakeside School have been visiting Hawk Ridge once a month, learning and experiencing nature at its best. During each visit, Gail Johnejack, Education Director at Hawk Ridge, leads the students into the woods to learn and experience. The students have learned about many different kinds of birds (characteristics, habitat, migratory routes, etc.). They have also learned about trees and identifying tracks in the snow. She has had many different learning games to keep the kids engaged while out in the woods. The students even had a chance to see the bird banding station up close. Every time the students go to the Ridge, they count and graph the birds they see in different seasons to observe if there is a difference in the number each month.

The experiences that these students receive each month cannot be replicated in the classroom. They are gaining so much by visiting Hawk Ridge each month. The students at St. Michael's consider Hawk Ridge to be a very special place where memories are being made and adventures in learning await.

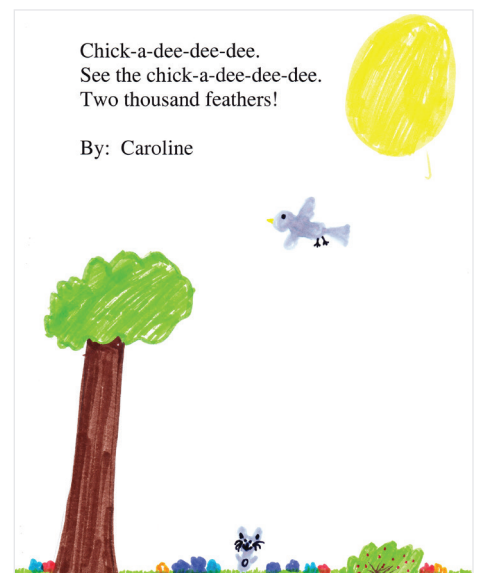
FROM GAIL:

*I was so excited when Julianne called and we talked about a partnership. The idea was to integrate birds and migration across her curriculum and we provide the support and monthly visits to the Ridge. This idea has proved to be a success! I love meeting her class at the Ridge and I'm getting to know the students in a way that isn't possible when classes come to the Ridge just once. They are interested and curious. They are challenging me to find just the right activity to support what they are learning at school.*

*I called them when “Jack” the Golden Eagle was caught. Several students came up after school to see the release and they still talk about it, as well as following “Jack” online. I can see the connections that they are making as they visit each month. They are developing a ‘sense of place’. This partnership is a win-win, especially for these kids. If only we could clone Julianne Blazevic!*

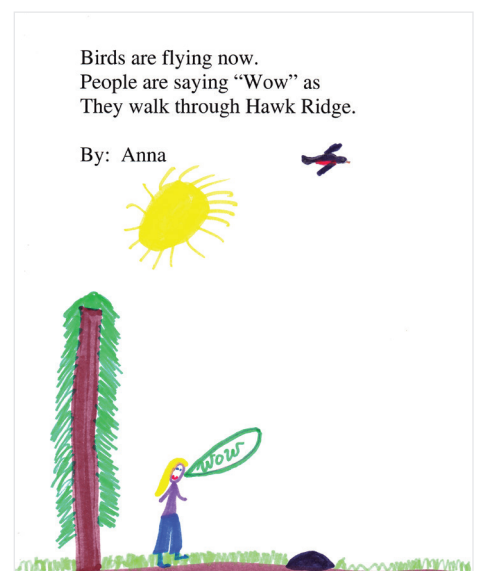
Chick-a-dee-dee-dee.  
See the chick-a-dee-dee-dee.  
Two thousand feathers!

By: Caroline



Birds are flying now.  
People are saying “Wow” as  
They walk through Hawk Ridge.

By: Anna



Hawk Ridge Haikus by St. Michael's students

# FALL EDUCATION SUMMARY

by GAIL JOHNEJACK

"Growing Pains" was one of the themes in this newsletter a year ago – a reference to the transition from one Education Director, who ran the program for a decade, to the next Director. Now that I look back on that transition, I'd have to add a heap of joys to those transitional aches. There were plenty of both. At times I felt overwhelmed and exhausted. Perhaps more often, I felt appreciation, pleasure, and satisfaction.

Let's start with appreciation. Several seasoned hands returned this year; Erik Bruhnke as Count Interpreter, Katie (Borg) Swanson and Margie Menzies as Naturalists, and Sarah Glesner for Owl Programs. Their experience and energy kept the program rolling. What a relief it was to have them around! Jessica Chatterton, a volunteer, joined our staff as a Naturalist, bringing excellent bird and people skills. We also had fine Substitute Naturalists– David Stieler, Katie Kristenson, Tessa Enroth, and Brian Scott; and countless incredible volunteers. Together we shared a season of hard work, learning, and laughter.

## COOL NEW STUFF

New this year, were the Junior Raptor Activity Guide and the Kid's Cart. These were very successful and satisfying!

The Junior Raptor Activity Guide had been an idea for several years, finally coming to fruition thanks to Katie Swanson. She researched other booklets, talked with people, conned her artist husband, Adam Swanson, into doing the artwork, and produced a wonderful booklet for our 7-12 year old visitors. Thanks to generous donations for youth, we were able to provide an Adopt-A-Raptor opportunity to any child that completed a booklet. This was incredibly successful -- the young people listened to raptor demonstrations, asked naturalists questions, used bird books, and were then able to adopt a raptor. The kids were all so proud!

The new Kid's Cart is for our youngest visitors. Making bird masks was a great hit, as was making toilet-paper-roll binoculars.

(CAPTION for photo: This young visitor made a Bald Eagle mask. Just after finishing it, a Bald Eagle flew directly overhead, low enough for her to get a good look at it. She



Photo by Julianne Blazevic

was thrilled. The mask activity helped her connect more fully to the live bird above.)

We also "bird-banded" some children at the Kid's Cart. We explained the banding process, measured arms, and used initials to come up with bird names for participants. The 'Cart' was out every weekend, so we had several recaptures. One girl remembered her band number and another learned that birds only get one band. We are looking for more durable bands and will be adding a recapture column to our banding chart.

The feedback that we received on the Kid's Cart was all positive. Families told us how much they appreciated the activities geared toward kids and even wondered about things like "storytime" in the future. Thank you to the folks at BirdDay.org for the grant that provided ideas, materials and supplies. We have greatly increased our ability to connect young people to birds and the outdoors.

## MY FAVORITE THINGS

My favorite moments; my greatest joys, included these: "This is a cool place!!" said a youngster as he dropped the change from his just purchased soda into our donation box. "Did you make a wish?" asked another, as someone released a bird. A young couple shared a sharp-shin on the day of their engagement. On the last day of the season, a teacher and I laughed out loud with her students as raptors poured past, low and easy to see, right at binocular time. My favorite though, was the young girl who said something like this: "You know, I didn't really care about birds before. Now I think I might like to do something like this."

Growing pains? Yes. Incredible moments? Yes. Thank you for your time, talent, treasure, and encouragement. Together, we totally make a difference.

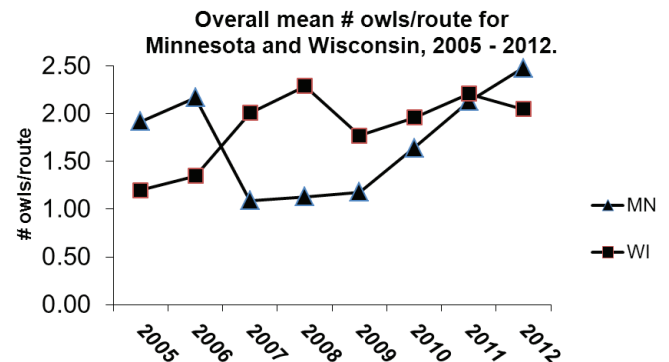
I'm sending a huge and heartfelt thank you to Janelle, for being there when I needed her; and to Julie O'Connor for her many years of service and for the endless inspiration that flows gracefully from her to anyone within range... Julie – Thank you for everything - you know how much that is.

# WESTERN GREAT LAKES OWL MONITORING PROJECT 2012

by DAVE GROSSHUESCH

2012 marked the eighth 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 was the 118 volunteers willing to spend an evening or more listening for owls that made the survey successful! Their efforts contribute towards monitoring owl populations to an extent that could not be done using ordinary methods. Fortunately the rewards of the survey are not only found in the numbers, but also, in the wonderment and joy of experiencing the nightlife in the world of owls!

2012 barely bested the 2011 season but marked the best owl survey season to date for both states combined at 2.24 owls per route. Minnesota experienced a 14% increase in owls compared to a 7% decline in Wisconsin. The former's increase largely resulted from 37% and 30% increases in Barred and Great Horned Owls, respectively; Wisconsin saw a 5% and 22% decline in these same species. In total, 314 owls comprising seven species were recorded on 100 routes. As is usual, the top three owl species combined were Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl. Of interest,

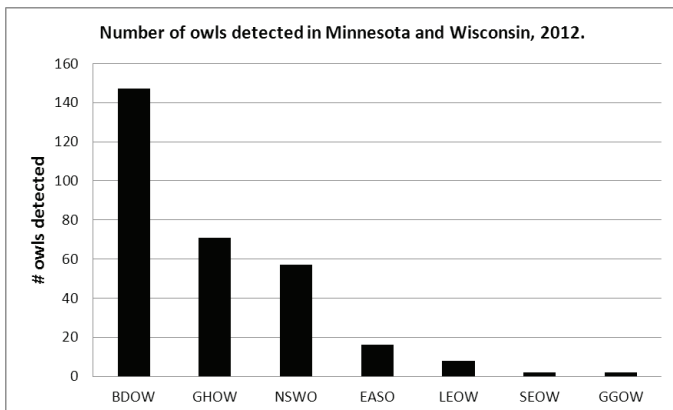


help to address management questions for some species. Results of all analyses will be used to adjust survey design to adequately meet survey objectives and engage land managers in hopes of providing them the information they need to better manage and conserve owls.

Thanks again to all those that participated in the 2012 Owl Survey!

*If you are interested in participating in the Owl Monitoring Survey in Minnesota, go to the Hawk Ridge website at:*

[www.hawkridge.org/research/springowl.html](http://www.hawkridge.org/research/springowl.html)



there was a record high number of Eastern Screech Owls detected in Wisconsin and a couple of Great Gray Owls detected in Minnesota.

Partners in the Western Great Lakes Region Owl Survey also received a grant to conduct detailed analyses of all years' data prior to the 2014 field season. This analysis is ongoing and will include calculations of detection probabilities, assessment of variables affecting detectability (e.g. time of year, count duration, number of survey replicates, etc.), 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, we hope to pursue habitat analyses to investigate habitat associations of owls and



Photo by Norma Malinowski

**BDOW**  
BARRED OWL  
**GHOW**  
GREAT HORNED OWL  
**NSWO**  
N. SAW-WHET OWL  
**EASO**  
E. SCREECH OWL  
**LEOW**  
LONG-EARED OWL  
**SEOW**  
SHORT-EARED OWL  
**GGOW**  
GREAT GRAY OWL



# 2012 FALL RAPTOR BANDING REPORT

by FRANK NICOLETTI



Apprentice Raptor Bander from Argentina, Matias Juhant, with Northern Harrier

Photo by Kate Nicoletti

For the second year in a row, I managed the Hawk Ridge banding operation. I was able to maintain the same effort, as in 2011, with running three raptor banding stations. Each station was operated by a trained and licensed bander and assisted with volunteers. These volunteers were an essential aspect of the operation and allowed us to run multiple stations efficiently without increasing the number of banders to be hired.

The 2012 season proved to be a productive year. The number of raptors captured and banded between the three stations totaled 4,806; this includes 73 foreign recoveries and 17 returns. Among the 4,806 raptors there were 2,170 owls. The owls were mostly banded at the main station at Hawk Ridge, except for the ancillary Boreal Owl station where 136 were captured, of which 22 were Boreal Owls. The Hawk Ridge main station was in operation from 15 August- 2 December. The Moose Valley station ran from 1 September to 12 November, while the Paine Farm station ran from 1 September to 1 November. A total of 232 days were logged. The overall average number of hawks banded per day was just over 11, which is below last season's 13.

The overall diurnal migration this fall was below the 2011 season. We banded approximately 700 less hawks compared to 2011. This is mainly a reflection of the poor

Sharp-shinned Hawk and immature Red-tailed Hawk flight. The flights in September were slow with a poor flight of Sharp-shinned Hawks (unlike 2011); however most other species numbers were on par. A total of 1,904 raptors were banded in September, representing 73% of the diurnal season total. October's total of 552 was low, as was November's total of only 39, as compared to 785 and 120 raptor respectively in 2011. Often during the season when we had favorable weather conditions, the raptor movement was lackluster at best. Flights of hawks never materialized. We did have some exciting highlights, which included the third ever Red-shouldered and Swainson's Hawks banded; Boreal Owls; and the first adult Golden Eagle captured.

The owl migration was spectacular with a record number of 2,033 owls captured at Hawk Ridge. This is the largest number recorded at Hawk Ridge (previous record

was 1,475 banded in 1995). The owl protocol was the same as last season with two caller units, one each for Northern Saw-whet and Long-eared owl, which ran simultaneously during the night. The saw-whet caller was placed in the west net lanes while the long-eared caller was placed in the east net (pines grove) lanes. Owl flights were consistent during the migration period. We were able to hire an owl bander this season, which allowed the other banders to get some sleep.

After last season's record four Bald Eagles, none were captured this season. Northern Harriers were banded in good numbers this season with a combined total of 56, 45 being from the main station, which is well above the average of 23.8. The Sharp-shinned Hawk total was 2,037, which is down by nearly 600 from 2011. However, considering the count was down from 19,475 in 2011 to 12,617 this season, I would say we do well with our capture rate. A total of 1,042 were captured at the main station, which is below the average of 1,561. We had five returns: three from 2011, one each from 2010 and 2006. Cooper's Hawks were banded in fair numbers, 41, including 24 at the main station. Much like the Sharp-shinned Hawk count, Cooper's Hawk numbers counted were down from 133 in 2011 to only 77 this fall. Northern Goshawks at 159 were better than expected again considering that only 269 were counted from the overlook. There was one foreign recovery. The age/sex breakdown was as follows: hatch-year male 105 or 66%, hatch-year female 24 or 15%, second-year male 14, second-year female 10, and three and two after-second-year male and female, respectively.

A hatch-year Red-shouldered Hawk was captured and banded at Hawk Ridge on 29 August. This represents the third record for the ridge, all of which have been hatch-year birds. Broad-winged Hawks were well represented with a combined 14 banded, 10 at the main station, which is one above the average of nine. Of these, three were adults and 11 were hatch-years. It was a slightly above average year for the Red-tailed Hawks that were counted at the overlook (6,468). We captured 155, of which two

were recoveries. Unlike last season, when we banded 290, this season's numbers lack the November flight of immatures and were impacted by a poor October flight. Of the 152 banded, one was a second-year

## THE OWL MIGRATION WAS SPECTACULAR WITH A RECORD NUMBER OF 2,033 OWLS CAPTURED AT HAWK RIDGE

rufous morph and one was a hatch-year light Harlan's. Two Rough-legged Hawks were banded, both adult females, a light and a dark morph. A Swainson's Hawk was captured and banded at Paine Farm on 15 September, a hatch-year bird. This is the third record, with one banded at Hawk Ridge in 1981 and one at Moose Valley in 2007. An adult male Golden Eagle was captured at Hawk Ridge on 12 November, during a great eagle day at the ridge when 488 Bald Eagles and 50 goldens were counted from the lookout. This eagle was banded and fitted with a satellite transmitter by Mark Martell through Audubon MN and the Golden Eagle Project (refer to Golden Eagle Project article for more info). This winter "Jack", who is named after one of Hawk Ridge founders - the late Pershing "Jack" Hofslund, traveled south over 1,000 miles to southern Missouri, near the Arkansas border. This is the furthest south that the Golden Eagle Project has tracked these eagles in the midwest.

The falcon numbers were quite varied. American Kestrel with 53 banded seemed lower than expected considering the numbers counted. There were only 19 banded at the main station, which is below the average of 41. Merlin numbers were good with 88 banded (45 at main station) between the 3 stations, which is nearly 44% of the number counted at the overlook. Peregrine Falcon numbers were good with 11 captured, and considering the low count of 52, we did well. One hatch-year male was a

recovery that was originally banded up the shore in MN this past summer.

Northern Saw-whet Owl numbers were a record high this season with 2,029; this total surpasses the 1995 record season total of 1,402. Of the 2,029, 113 were captured at the boreal station. This season we had 68 encounters (already banded): 56 foreign recoveries and 12 returns. Of the 12 returns, 6 were from 2011, 4 from 2010 and one each from 2009 and 2008. Boreal Owls were recorded with 34 this season in what we think is their 4-year cycle. Twenty-two were recorded at the boreal site, while 12 were at the main station. This number may seem high, but is the lowest with this much effort since we started in 2000. Long-eared Owls were recorded in good numbers with a combined total of 97



Photo by Chris Neri

**Fall Raptor Bander, Nova Mackentley, displaying a Long-eared Owl**

banded with 96 at the main, which is above the average of 59. Barred Owls were 10 with nine at the main and one at the boreal. We had a recovery from November of 2010 that was recaptured at the main station and originally banded at Moose Valley.

We had a number of interesting recoveries this fall. Among the hawks there were 12 Sharp-shinned Hawks that were already banded with 6 coming from Thunder Cape Bird Observatory, Ontario, which is nearly 180 miles northeast of Hawk Ridge; one from 2011 and five from this season with the number of days between captures ranging from 5 to 14. We also had one from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Michigan, banded on May 3, 2012, and two banded by Frank Taylor's banding station (8 miles northeast of Hawk Ridge) in 2011. Exciting

was one that was banded at a banding station near Mosomboa, Veracruz, Mexico in 2010.

Among the 56 Northern Saw-whet Owl recoveries (which is by far the most numerous species recaptured), Thunder Cape came in with 18 records: two from 2009 and 2010, five from 2011; and including nine in-season recoveries ranging from 4 to 20 days apart. Other recoveries from other banding sites included three from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, one from 2006 and two from 2011; one from near Long Point, Ontario from 2011; as well as four from Whitefish Point: two from 2011 and two from 2012, including a summer bird that Hawk Ridge fall banders, Chris Neri and Nova Mackentley, banded on their summer dispersal project! Other records are still pending from the USGS Bird Banding Lab.

Nova, Chris, and myself staffed the banding stations, while Sam Roberts worked the night shift at the main station banding owls. Special thanks to David Alexander and Annmarie Geniusz for the tremendous amount of time they spent volunteering this fall to assist with both the raptor and passerine banding. I would also like to thank the numerous volunteers and others that helped in many ways, including: Karen Stubenvoll, Tara Haynes, Todd Burnside, Jessamy Schwartz, Stephen Bockhold, Karl Bardon, Cory Ritter, Jane Hosking, Andrew Longtin, Gary Leeper, David Carman, Katie Swanson, Danny Pirtle, Amber Burnette, Madison McConnell, Mark Martell, and Matias Juhant (visiting from Slovenia, who studied here for five weeks as a raptor banding apprentice); the education staff and volunteers, the Stewardship Committee including Bob Owens, Tim Bates and Judy Gibbs, the MCC crew that helped clear brush and take down the blind. Also, I would especially like to thank my wife Kate for all she does and for her support. Others that helped in different ways included Dick and Adeline Green, Peder Svingen, Ben and Josh Yokel, Eric Helland and Mary Normandia. I would especially like to thank all those who supported the research through their contributions to the adopt-a-raptor program.

In light of the amazing numbers of birds caught, one has to wonder how many more passed through undetected. One of the advantages of banding birds is you can make some educated guesses in that regard. You would expect that if banders intercepted a significant proportion of the irrupting population, a similar proportion of recovered dead owls would be banded. Instead, of the 172 dead birds collected during the 2004-05 irruption, only three were banded, or less than two percent.

This implies a sizeable population of irrupting birds. How large? The Lincoln Index is designed to estimate the number of individuals in a population based on band recoveries. Plugging the numbers from the 2004-05 irruption into the formula suggests that the population of Boreal Owls irrupting into and through MN (including NW Wisconsin) numbered in excess of 20,000 birds! Because of the limitations of the index, this isn't a "take it to the bank" number. It is safe to say, though, that many thousands of Boreal Owls moved into Minnesota during this, and likely other, irruptions, with relatively few dying. This casts new light on Boreal Owl irruptions, showing them to be a highly adaptive, rather than highly lethal, behavior. Indeed, it appears the Boreal Owl is quite the savvy traveler.

Another implication of the banding results is that Minnesota's forests regularly shelter Boreal Owls from breeding populations covering a much larger area. Our forests, then, could be providing critical winter habitat to regionally and internationally significant Boreal Owl populations. Winter habitat management for irrupting owls hasn't been an issue for Minnesota's land management agencies, but the insights generated through banding Boreal Owls suggest it probably should receive attention.

This is only one example of the type of crucial information that banding programs at Hawk Ridge can yield. Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory will continue to be a leader in conducting research that contributes to conservation of Minnesota's bird species, like the Boreal Owl.

## FALL 2012 NON-RAPTOR SUMMARY

by KARL BARDON

For the sixth year in a row, all non-raptors were also counted at Hawk Ridge during the official raptor count, and for the third year in a row, results from a simultaneous morning count at the Lester River condo were added to those from the Hawk Ridge Main Overlook to yield a composite total of 210,858 non-raptors. Although there is often substantial overlap in many species between the Main Overlook on the Ridge and the shore site at Lester River, totals of 70,402 non-raptors were counted closest to the Ridge, and 140,456 were counted closest to the Shore. This compares to composite totals of 274,162 counted in 2010 and 320,779 counted in 2011.

Although the 2012 total non-raptor count was noticeably less than the previous two falls with similar composite data from the Ridge and the Shore, this below average total can be attributed to just a single species: American Robin (invariably the most abundant bird counted). The 27,542 robins counted this season were not just 50% below average, but also 110,000 below last year's high count. Some other common species which were noticeably less common this season included Cackling Goose (-24%), American White Pelican (-38%), Cliff Swallow (-200%), and Snow Bunting (-89%). The number of warblers was also very low; although the 9981 total warblers counted this season is slightly better than last season's dismal 7884, these numbers are far fewer than the 31,537 warblers counted in 2010 when the shore site was first added, and even fewer compared to warbler counts done at the Lakewood pumping station 20 years ago (average nearly 50,000).

Most of the more common species were seen in above average numbers this year, however, and it was a great season overall. Four strays from the West showed up this season, highlighted by a Clark's Nutcracker flying north over the ridge on 12 October (an accidental species in Minnesota seen only once previously in the last 25 years), a Varied Thrush was caught at the banding station on 7 October and released at the Main Overlook, and both a Mountain Bluebird and a Townsend's Solitaire

were seen at the Ridge on 13 November. Other highlights included small flocks of Trumpeter Swans on three dates totaling 21 birds, a Red-throated Loon flying over the Ridge with a flock of 22 Common Loons on 26 October, another Red-throated Loon flying along the shore on 6 October, an adult Franklin's Gull flying west over the Ridge on 1 September (the first for the Hawk Ridge checklist), and a total of 12 Dickcissels heard flying over.

Migration often comes in spurts, with big days followed by a number of slow days. This seemed especially true this season, with long periods of very slow migration punctuated by a few very exciting days when there seemed to be birds everywhere. One of the many great mysteries of migration is how all these thousands of birds, of many different species, all acting as individuals, and all ultimately coming from different locations, can gather together and decide to fly on the same day.

For example, prior to 24 August, the average daily total since counting began on 15 August was only 645 birds, but on 24 August a total of 12,632 birds flew by. This included three high counts for

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**MIGRATION OFTEN COMES  
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**Hawk Ridge Count Director, Karl Bardon, and Banding Director, Frank Nicoletti, counting Common Nighthawks in August**

*Photo by Kate Nicoletti*

three completely different kinds of birds: 6877 Common Nighthawks (highest count for the season), 4208 Cedar Waxwings, (second highest count for the state) and 1252 Red Crossbills (new state high count, far surpassing any previous counts). So what made this day so important for so many birds? It was the warmest day of the season, with a high of 85 degrees!

Another example came only two days later on 26 August when 9896 birds were counted, including new state high counts for three species (!): 304 Eastern Kingbirds, 74 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and 471 Bobolinks. Also counted that day were 3068 more Cedar Waxwings and 3272 more Common Nighthawks. So what triggered this massive movement of neo-tropical migrants? Most interestingly, this flight occurred late in the morning, 3-5 hours after sunrise, under hot and hazy conditions, with a high of 83 degrees.

As can be expected, good migration days were a little more consistent in September. Some of the better daily totals were an early flight of 2745 Canada Geese on 7 September (highest Hawk Ridge count to

date), 5308 Blue Jays on 14 September (the second highest count for the state), 4467 Cedar Waxwings on 11 September (also the second highest count for the state), 1323 American Goldfinches on 13 September (another new state high count), and 713 American Pipits on 23 September (second highest state count).

Another exciting day came on 21 September when a big cold front seemed to be ushering out all of the remaining neo-tropical migrants and other warm-weather loving birds; it was one of those days when there are birds everywhere and one can only stand in awe, trying to count as many birds as possible, but knowing there are thousands of birds being missed. Totals for the day included 3810 warblers, and 730 White-throated Sparrows (highest fall count for the state). Another cold front on 6 October brought in the biggest day of the season, including 5348 American Robins, 4645 Rusty Blackbirds, and 850 Common Grackles. Although I was hoping for a lot more robins, this turned out to be the biggest day of the season.

Late October and November were

dominated by finches. Once the goldfinches mostly finished moving in late September, the siskins started up, peaking at 4050 on 14 October (third highest state count). A blizzard of 2375 finches of nine species came through on 28 October, including 3 Pine Grosbeaks, 46 Purple Finches, 2 House Finches, 116 Red Crossbills, 831 White-winged Crossbills (new state high count), 778 Common Redpolls, 133 Pine Siskins, 48 American Goldfinches, and 1 Evening Grosbeak. This was the last major flight of the season, although Redpolls and Pine Grosbeaks continued to move through in November, peaking at 968 Common Redpolls on 9 November and 309 Pine Grosbeaks on 12 November. At least four Hoary Redpolls began visiting the Hawk Ridge feeder in late November- a very nice close to a great season.

The non-raptor count is made possible by many people, especially Jan Green, Janelle Long, and Jerry Niemi. My thanks to everyone who helped with spotting both raptors and non-raptors, especially early-rising, stalwart Andrew Longtin and Cory Ritter.

# FALL 2012 RAPTOR SUMMARY

by KARL BARDON

For the 41st consecutive season, Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory conducted an official raptor count from the Main Overlook at Hawk Ridge. During the standardized season from 15 August-30 November 2012, a total of 56,974 raptors were seen during 888.7 hour of observation. This is the ninth season of below average numbers since the big year in 2003 when over 200,000 raptors were seen. Although most species were below average, the number of both Bald and Golden eagles continues to be well above average. Highlights this fall included a record flight of 57 Golden Eagles on 12 November, and totals of 3 Mississippi Kites, 5 Red-shouldered Hawks, and 18 Swainson's Hawks during the season.

The below average number of birds certainly did not appear to be due to weather, since there seemed to be an abundance of NW winds, which are traditionally considered the most favorable conditions for raptor flights at Hawk Ridge. Its true enough that NW winds can produce good flights, but this season more than any other, a lot of days with NW winds did not produce the expected flight, and we often had good flights directly over the counting platform on days with light E or S winds.

The season started off with six days of good NW winds on 16-21 August, which produced some early Broad-wing kettles, including 190 on the 20th, but this supposed favorable stretch of winds was too early to produce a big flight, and August seemed relatively slow overall with no big days of Sharpies like we had last season.

## I FEEL REALLY LUCKY TO HAVE SO MANY PEOPLE SO WILLING TO HELP OUT WITH THE RAPTOR COUNT

September also started off with a nice stretch of NW winds on 5-9 September, which culminated in an early push of 15,204 Broad-wings and 7 Swainson's on the 9th, which turned out to be the peak day of the season for Broad-wings. Another day of NW winds on the 13th produced an additional 5,038 Broad-wings and 1319 Sharp-shins, which turned out to be the peak day for Sharpies. These two flights seemed rather



**Always can count on Karl to count all the birds!**

*Photo by Karen Stubenvoll*

predictable, and things seemed to be on a really good pace, with the right weather producing an early push of birds. Much harder to explain, however, is the lack of Broad-wings during an extended period of mostly NW winds 17-24 September: strong NW winds in the late afternoon of the 16th produced 1148 Broad-wings, but continued strong N winds on the 17th only produced an additional 1295 Broad-wings, and the counters watched as kettles of Broad-wings got up in the morning, began drifting out over the lake, and apparently eventually disappeared too far to see out over the lake. The subsequent seven days had strong NW winds but only produced an additional 2742 Broad-wings! Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? Did the strong NW winds push the birds too far out over the lake? Had the Broad-wings moved through already?

A similar situation happened in October, with a relatively early push of Red-tails during a period of mostly N-NW winds 5-14 October, culminating in 952 birds on the 14th (the peak day of the month), including 641 Red-tails and 16 Northern Goshawks. Again, things seemed to be on a good pace, with the right weather producing a good number of birds, but a stronger front on 24-27 October including snow on the 25th produced only a modest flight of Red-tails and eagles, with only 800 total raptors on the 26th and 790 on the 27th, at a time when peak days of over 1,000 Red-tails have often occurred. So where are all the Red-tails?

November was exceptionally slow most days, punctuated by several very big days. On November 12th a very strong cold front sweeping through the central plains brought snow and subzero temperatures to the West, pushing an awesome flight of 488 Bald Eagles, 81 Rough-legged Hawks, and 57 Golden Eagles over the Ridge during snow squalls, which was the peak day of the season for these three species, and the best day ever at the Ridge for Golden Eagles. It was a great flight and a great way to end the season, so we won't mention that the remaining 18 days of November were very slow.

I feel really lucky to have so many people so willing to help out with the raptor count. My thanks to Joe Beck, Stephen Bockhold, Dave Carman, Russ and Ann Edmonds, Tessa Enroth, Jo Fritz, Annmarie Geniusz, Sarah Glesner, Jan Green, Jane Hosking, Janelle Long, Andrew Longtin, Nova Mackentley, Scott Moorhouse, Chris Neri, Frank and Kate Nicoletti, Julie O'Connor, Cory Ritter, Tori Steely, Karen Stubenvoll, and Peder Svingen.



# VOLUNTEER REPORT

by JULIE O'CONNOR



Everybody loves Hawk Ridge Volunteer, Jo Fritz, including this beautiful Cooper's Hawk

The fall of 2012 was a season of transition! Our first season with Gail Johnjack as our new Education Director was wonderful and our corps of seasoned volunteers eased the way for new staff to step in and be effective.

We had 67 active volunteers at the Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve main overlook during

September and October. When we add in the behind-the-scenes volunteers who help with the count, office work and off-site projects, that number swells to over a hundred. 2012 was also the first year we've had a formal volunteer program for people interested in learning about banding birds. Matti and Kaitlin Erpestad led this small, dedicated group of volunteers under the supervision of Frank Nicoletti, and it was a great success in this pilot year!

In 2012, our volunteers recorded 3,638 hours of service! The US Department 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 nearly \$80,000 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; 40 exceeded it; 22 logged more than 40 hours, and our top 5 volunteers logged in a combined total of over 500 hours! Our banding station volunteers also logged some huge totals, as



Amazing Hawk Ridge Volunteer, Gretchen McDaniel, with Sharpie

their time requirement is very different.

In addition to what you see at Hawk Ridge 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.



All smiles...Hawk Ridge Volunteer, Bill Huseth

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 2013 is your year to get involved, send an email to [volunteer@hawkridge.org](mailto:volunteer@hawkridge.org) and we'll get you on board with this great organization.

Photos by Karen Stubenvoll



# VOLUNTEER VOICES

by ANNMARIE GENIUSZ

I've been volunteering for Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory for 3 years now, and in many ways, I am a product of their public raptor education programs! My first trip to Hawk Ridge was in the fall of 2006, shortly after we (Steve, our cats, and I) moved to Duluth for his work. I arrived at the Ridge on one of the biggest Broad-winged Hawk migration days in recent memory, and quickly learned what a kettle was. Gradually, Steve and I started hanging out more and more at Hawk Ridge, until we were pretty much at the overlook every fall day that he had off from work.

We weren't born birders, but we were such fans of the location, friendly volunteers and staff, and free public education, that we transformed. In 2010, we both became official volunteers at the overlook, though it was hard to tell when we were officially volunteering and when we were just hanging out!

One memorable day of that first year was the Sunday of the Hawk Weekend festival,

full of eye patches, scarves, stickers and a pirate language dictionary for any of my fellow volunteers needing to be festooned. I spent the day directing traffic with a pirate sword and chattering in pirate prattle over the radio. I even "Arrrrgh-ed" at Mayor Don Ness and family! So yes, I'd say directing traffic that weekend is a very fun job!

The overlook duties were a great place to learn the basics of bird identification and



**Brown Creeper displayed by banding volunteer, Annmarie Geniusz**

But of course, what most volunteers and a few visitors to Hawk Ridge know me now as an assistant volunteer bander, which also started that first fall. I helped former Education Director, Debbie Waters, and Julie O'Connor with that season's passerine banding demos at the overlook.

I met David Alexander (board member & banding volunteer) that season, when he lent us a walk-in trap for the demos. Then I met Frank Nicoletti, while he visited Karl Bardon at the count platform. Both were very supportive and encouraging. Quickly the two of them became mentors and two of my favorite people to watch birds with. I'm not sure how to best sum up the next two seasons of volunteering, but I can tell you that I've been extremely privileged to work with a full spectrum of diurnal raptors, owls, and passerines that move through the Duluth area. I keep getting excited by "fuzzy" owl feet, crazy, aggressive chickadees, and Frank yelling to "Grab it! Grab it! Grab it!" when a Sharp-shinned Hawk is in the net. I'm looking forward to next fall, and hope to see all of you at the Ridge!



**Banding volunteer extraordinaire, Annmarie Geniusz, with Boreal Owl**

which happened to fall on September 19th or International Talk Like a Pirate Day. Knowing that Julie O'Connor was also a fan of this obscure and totally awesome holiday, I took the initiative to dress up and celebrate in proper pirate fashion (three cornered hat, cummerbund, wooden sword...). I also brought a small pirate chest

Hawk Ridge's role in the annual passerine and hawk migrations of this continent. It was wonderful to meet individuals who'd traveled from all over the country and the world to watch, admire, and adopt birds in what for me was a local, neighborhood park. As a beginning birder, these were wonderful lessons.

*Photos by Stephen Bockhold*

# BIRDATHON 2013

by JANELLE LONG

The 27th annual Hawk Ridge Birdathon in St. Louis County was held on Saturday May 18th. Ten teams birded through rain and fog to compete in several different categories. Team "Dave and the Foggy Bottom Boys" (John Ellis, Dave & Lars Benson) birded for 17 hours and took the win with an amazing total of 167 species! This was the 2nd highest team total in 27 years, as the 1996 winners (Terry Brashear, Mike Hendrickson, Mark Ochs, & Kim Risen) hold the record with 177 species. We applauded Dave Benson for completing his 25th Birdathon and presented him with a signed copy of the new Hawk Ridge book.

In all, a grand total of 197 species were counted. This was the eighth highest total in all years. The Hawk Ridge St. Louis County

Birdathon 27-year average is 190 species with a 27-year grand total of 266 species. 218 species was the highest total count in 1996 and 164 was the lowest count in 2011. Full summary and results can be found online at [www.hawkridge.org](http://www.hawkridge.org).

Thank you to Eagle Optics, Summit Brewing Company, Lake Superior Garden Center, Great Lakes Aquarium, Princeton University Press, and Michael Furtman ([www.michaelfurtman.com](http://www.michaelfurtman.com)) for your wonderful prize donations. We also sincerely thank all of the participants, pledge donors, and sponsors for your support. Proceeds raised from this event help support the research and education programs of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory! We hope you can join us next spring!



Dave Benson (left) celebrated his 25th St. Louis County Birdathon with award presented by Janelle Long (right)

Photo by Karen Stubenvoll

# FIRST BREEDING BIRD COUNT AT HAWK RIDGE

by GERALD J. NIEMI

We know about migrating birds at Hawk Ridge, but what birds use the area during the breeding season? We need to remember that Hawk Ridge is more than just the ridge. It encompasses 300 plus acres of deciduous forests of maple, birch, and aspen; coniferous forest primarily of pine; shrubby habitats of alder and willow; and open rocky areas with low shrubs. Although a preeminent raptor migration site, it is also home for many breeding bird species.

During the summer of 2012, Hawk Ridge established its first breeding bird monitoring program. All predominant habitat types were sampled systematically in a series of 10 minute point counts. On the mornings of June 3 and 11, 32 potentially breeding species were recorded. Twelve species of warblers were found including Chestnut-sided Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Nashville Warbler, American Redstart, Mourning Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, and Black-and-White Warbler. Other species of interest included the Indigo Bunting, Brown Creeper, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Ruffed Grouse.

The most common species detected were Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, and White-throated Sparrow. On average, eight species and 12 individuals were counted on each of the 11 point counts. Hawk Ridge certainly has more species that use the area during the breeding season, but these counts provide a repeatable and efficient way to measure their changes over time.

# PEREGRINE WATCH 2013!

by JANELLE LONG

Join us in Lake Place Park in downtown Duluth to observe and learn about the nesting Peregrine Falcons. Naturalists will be on-site from early June through mid-July. Watch the exciting happenings at the nestbox on the Greysolon Plaza building through spotting scopes and video

monitor. For further program information and detailed schedule, please go to [www.hawkridge.org](http://www.hawkridge.org) or contact us at [peregrine@hawkridge.org](mailto:peregrine@hawkridge.org) or 218-428-6209. Peregrine Watch 2013 has been made possible thanks to Lisa Dayton and other individual contributors.





# TRACKING GOLDEN EAGLES

by MARK MARTELL



Glorious Golden Eagle

Photo by Chris Neri

Every fall around 200 Golden Eagles are counted over Hawk Ridge. Arriving late in fall, usually mid to late October, the origins and destinations of these birds are one of the more interesting questions posed by the birds seen over the Ridge. Some clues come from the personal observations, mid-winter surveys and telemetry data being collected by Scott Mehus of the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, MN and myself through Audubon Minnesota. The information we have been gathering present strong evidence that there is a regular wintering population of Golden Eagles using southwestern Wisconsin, southeastern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa. We believe that these birds are not irregular migrants or visitors but constitute a regular wintering population.

To determine the winter habitat use and home range of these Golden Eagles, as well as their breeding origins, and migratory routes we began a program using satellite-tracked GPS units to follow the movements of the Golden Eagles wintering in this area. To date we have tracked five birds who have all summered in eastern Canada extending from the western part of Nunavut to 2,000 mile east in Newfoundland. This is evidence that the birds wintering in Minnesota and Wisconsin are part of the Eastern North American population, and that they are coming from across the breeding range of this population.

## "JACK" – GOLDEN EAGLE NO. 53

On November 12, 2012 an adult, male Golden Eagle was captured at the Hawk

Ridge banding station by Frank Nicoletti. A satellite tracking unit was put on him and he was released at the Ridge. He is one of the three birds tracked this winter to add to our knowledge of wintering Golden Eagles in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The eagle was named "Jack" after Hawk Ridge founder - the late Dr. Pershing "Jack" Hofslund.

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**THIS IS EVIDENCE THAT  
THE BIRDS WINTERING IN  
MINNESOTA AND WISCONSIN  
ARE PART OF THE EASTERN  
NORTH AMERICAN POPULATION**

"Jack" wasted no time in continuing his journey south, moving through Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and Missouri. On Christmas Eve he arrived in Ozark County, Missouri, very near the Arkansas border. He had traveled over 1,000 miles since leaving Hawk Ridge. He spent 2 ½ months in this part of southern Missouri utilizing the wooded hills and ridges of the Ozark Mountains. It was as far south as we had tracked any of our birds and he was surely as the southern edge of the species wintering range.

On March 14 he began moving north, retracing his steps and as of March 29 was near Molson Lake north of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. His spring route took him between Cloquet and Duluth through St. Louis County and over Rainy Lake northern Minnesota. We have seen other birds follow



a similar route in past years. As an adult, we hope that Jack is on his way to his breeding territory somewhere in Canada.

Migratory birds rely on migration and winter habitats for their survival and an understanding of their needs on these areas is critical for developing conservation strategies. Knowledge of habitat and prey needs of wintering Golden Eagles will be important to their future survival. While it is unusual for wildlife managers in Wisconsin and Minnesota to manage for a winter migratory population, successful conservation efforts for Eastern Golden Eagles will necessitate international cooperation between Canadian national and provincial biologists, state natural resource agencies, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, local governments and, most importantly private landowners. In the same way that we rely upon, and expect, effective conservation of the neo-tropical migrants that winter in Latin America so too are we expected to understand and conserve during the winter these eagles

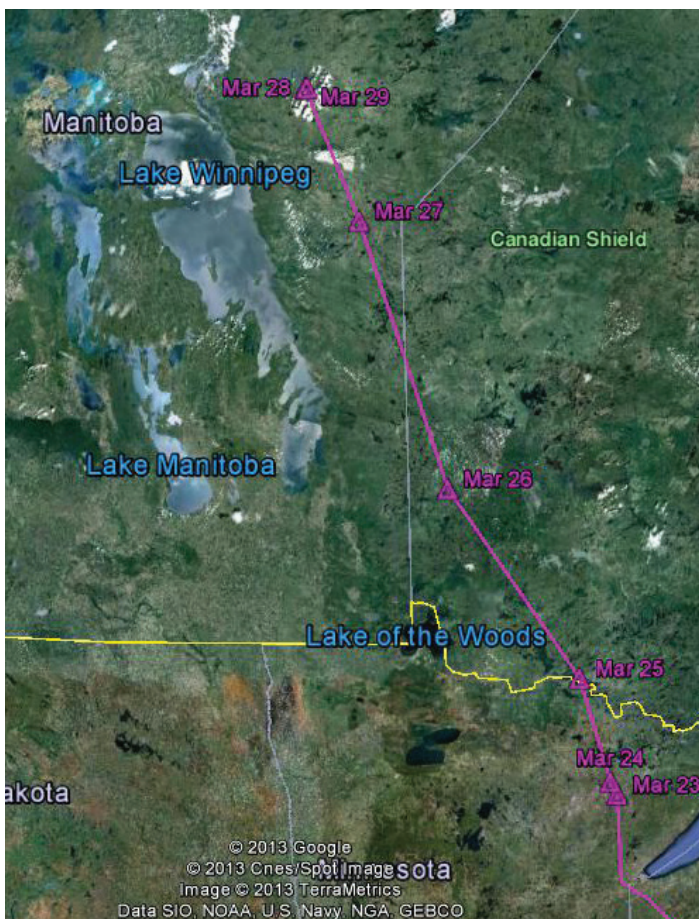


**Dick Blomberg (left), Mark Martell (center) holding “Jack”, and Cindy Blomberg (right) getting ready for the exciting release**

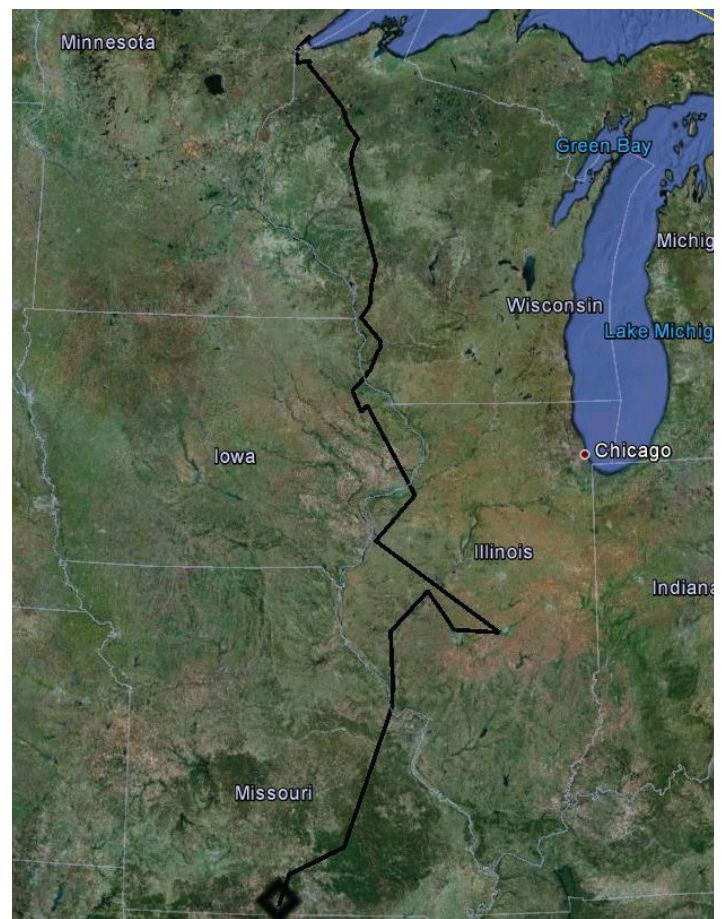
*Photo by Hawk Ridge Staff*

that breed to our north. Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory has an important role to play in monitoring and documenting Golden Eagles in fall and spring. By working with

our partners in the U.S. and Canada we can build our understanding of these great eagles and work to ensure their survival in the future.



**Jack's track north between March 23-29, 2013, courtesy of Minnesota Audubon**



**The track of Jack from Hawk Ridge to winter grounds in southern Missouri, courtesy of Minnesota Audubon**



# HAWK WEEKEND FESTIVAL 2012



Hawk Weekend festival visitors viewing the grand migration

Photo by Karen Stubenvoll

On the weekend of September 14-16, 2012, we celebrated the great fall migration and shared the excitement with visitors during our annual Hawk Weekend Festival. Over 125 people registered and participated in a variety of field trips, workshops, and evening events. At Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve, hundreds of people gathered under sunny skies to watch the live bird demos, attend public programs, and view the migration in action. 5,244 raptors (including a Mississippi Kite!) and 12,795 non-raptors (including 5,038 Blue Jays for 2nd highest state count!) delighted the crowds.

Many continued the celebration at our evening events held at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Duluth. We gathered for a fun social, which included our live and silent auction benefit, new Hawk Ridge book signing with Laura Erickson (who was also presented with the Hawk Ridge Lifetime Achievement award), delicious food, music, and cocktails all helped kick off the great evening speakers. Anna Peterson, Ph.D. candidate in the Conservation Biology Program at the

University of Minnesota, shared her enlightening research experiences on the magnificent fall bird migration along the North Shore of Lake Superior with her talk - "The Fantastic Fall Migration of Birds on Minnesota's North Shore". On Saturday evening, Sharon Stiteler, professional speaker, storyteller, and author presented a fun and entertaining talk "Today's Office" about her career in bird watching. Audience enjoyed the interesting and funny stories about her bird watching travels around the world.

Thanks to over 60 businesses & individuals, we raised approximately \$6600 at our auction benefit for the research, education, and stewardship programs of Hawk Ridge. We truly appreciate all of the gracious field trip & workshop leaders, wonderful volunteers, hard-working staff, interesting speakers, and amazing donors that helped make Hawk Weekend a huge success. Mark your calendar for Hawk Weekend 2013 - September 20-22nd. We hope to see you there!



Photo by Michael Furtman

## RED CROSSBILLS AT HAWK RIDGE IN 2012 MAKES HISTORY

by JAN GREEN

The HRBO daily count of birds from mid-August through November documents the migration passage of passerines and hawks. Each year there are impressive events hidden in the numbers. In August 2012 the unprecedented count of Red Crossbills was not only extremely early, but also of a magnitude that made the pages of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's glossy quarterly "Living Bird" winter 2013 issue. In discussing the "Superflight" of finches across the continent in the fall of 2012, that magazine stated: "In Minnesota, Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory reported an extraordinary August flight of Red Crossbills - more than 3,700, breaking the state's high count record three times in a single week" which became the "largest Red Crossbill movement ever recorded... at Minnesota's Hawk Ridge." The count that Karl Bardon does is entered into Cornell's eBird database as daily checklists. This allowed Cornell to use that information as part of a wider discussion on the continental fall migration of seed-eating birds from the Canadian boreal forest and their use of seed sources from conifers and other trees as well as bird feeders. Every small bit of information helps in unraveling the mysteries of bird migration and HRBO's counters provide a lot of bits!

# FALL 2012 PASSERINE BANDING REPORT

by DAVID ALEXANDER AND FRANK NICOLETTI



**Blue-headed Vireos held by passerine banding volunteers, Sam Roberts (left) and Annmarie Geniusz (right)**

*Photo by Karen Stubenvoll*

From early August through early November, 2012 a group of dedicated volunteers and staff banded over 2000 passerines at Hawk Ridge. Thanks to grant funds from the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation (Biodiversity Fund), we set out in early August with the goal of training a group of new volunteers and reinvigorating a passerine banding project that had languished a bit in the past few years. We succeeded beyond expectations and hope to build the program further in 2013.

There were many highlights, which included banding both species of cuckoo, two species of sandpiper, twenty-three species of warbler, a beautiful adult male Varied Thrush, a leucistic Red-eyed Vireo, and an amazing 104 Nashville Warblers on September 13th. The top five species by number were Nashville Warbler (301), White-throated Sparrow (267), American Redstart (204), Swainson's Thrush (126), and Red-eyed Vireo (99).

We banded passerines for 57 days during the fall. Most of the days were at the main banding station, but we were also able to do banding and public demonstrations for several weekends at the main overlook. These public programs were well received

and we will try to repeat them next fall. We also caught several passerines in the owl and raptor nets. The weather this fall was much more favorable than in 2011, and we had nine days where we banded more than 75 birds in a morning. Our busiest day was September 13th when we banded 165 birds of 21 species. Our season total for species was 74. In August, we banded 678 birds, in September 1437 birds, in October 217 birds,

and 7 birds were banded in November.

The relative numbers for various locations were 2147 birds banded in the main banding station passerine nets, 38 birds in the owl and raptor nets, and 154 birds banded during public banding demonstrations at the main hawk watching overlook.

We had a very successful fall banding passerines. None of it would have been possible without the dedication of a great group of staff and volunteers. Thanks especially to our banders in charge including Kaitlin and Matti Erpetstad, and Annmarie Geniusz. Special thanks to Sam Roberts and Cory Ritter who volunteered their time helping with passerines before their "other" jobs began. We also want to thank all the other volunteers who helped make it work including Steven Bockhold, Amber Burnett, Grace Glick, Joe Hodge, Heather MacDonald, Margie Menzies, Beth Miller, Grace Parikh, Danny Pirtle, Jaclyn Ramsey, Karen Stubenvoll, Robbie Tietge, Chris Tolman, Abby Valine, and Joel Vikre. Thanks also to Peter and Josh Yokel for making it all possible by constructing the new passerine/owl shack. Finally, we couldn't do any of this without the support of our wives. Thanks Christina and Kate! We look forward to a great fall migration.



**Canada Warbler**

*Photo by David Alexander*



# HAWK RIDGE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

by KATIE SWANSON

The 5 months I spent interning at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory were expansive and very educational. I began my internship working as a naturalist for Peregrine Watch in downtown Duluth. At this time I was already dedicated to the mission and goals of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory (HRBO) because of my volunteer work that I started 2 years prior. However, I had never participated in any other programs besides the fall season migration. It was great to be involved in Peregrine Watch to see how HRBO reaches out to the public away from the Hawk Ridge overlook during the fall season. As my journey moved forward, I found myself getting prepared for the fall season.

I was dreaming of educating the public on the magnificent raptors streaming overhead. As I was dreaming of this, I acquired the Hawk Ridge Internship position. This meant that I was going to be able to learn about all the workings of a non-profit organization like HRBO and this is exactly what I was able to accomplish. I had specific requirements to complete to earn my credits

at the University of Minnesota Duluth and I was able to do this and more.

I was involved at the overlook in pre-season planning, doing naturalist work, and assisting with managerial duties. I was able to be included in administrative planning and decisions for what was going on at the overlook. This experience not only helped

me as a naturalist and educator, but also helped me learn for managerial aspects at HRBO.

I was able to wear many hats throughout my internship at HRBO. I participated as a volunteer at the banding station and was able to learn about the whole banding

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**THIS EXPERIENCE NOT ONLY HELPED ME AS A NATURALIST AND EDUCATOR, BUT ALSO HELPED ME LEARN MANAGERIAL ASPECTS AT HRBO.**

operation. I helped out with passerines, diurnal raptors, and owls. This was very beneficial because it helped me learn about another limb of the organization and opened up a door to something that I am very passionate about. As you can probably tell, wearing all these hats kept me very busy. However, I was still doing more work behind the scenes.

I was able to work on my skills in developing educational materials. Projects included making graphics for use at Peregrine Watch, as well as, educational materials for the overlook during the fall season. This included lesson plans and developing an ageing raptors guide for naturalists. My biggest accomplishment, however, was creating an educational activity book for kids age 7-12. This was called the Junior Birder Raptor Activity Guide, which we sold for \$2 at the overlook.

Throughout my internship, I was always learning and continuing to develop skills. I felt involved and included in all the different parts of the organization. I was able to apply the knowledge I learned from my degree and will be able to apply what I learned while interning at HRBO to my career. Interning at HRBO was very beneficial for the organization and for me.



Katie reconnecting with falcon from summer Peregrine Watch program

Photo by Karen Stubenuoll



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\$15 Student (Vulture)      \$500 Supporting (Falcon)  
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\$50 Family (Hawk)      Additional Donation:  
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\$250 Soaring (Harrier)

### HELP FUND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Fall Public Education Programs at Hawk Ridge \$  
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### HELP FUND RESEARCH PROGRAMS

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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.

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The simplest way to accomplish this is to include a bequest in your will or trust. We should be named as "Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, a non-profit registered in the state of Minnesota."

You can also designate Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory as a beneficiary of your life insurance or your retirement plan. There is no set amount that one is required to donate in order to leave retirement plan

assets (for instance 401K or IRA), but it is usually best to designate a percentage rather than dollar amounts.

For expert advice, consult an estate planning attorney. Through the generosity of our members, donors, and supporters, we will continue our research, education, and stewardship to protect birds in the Western Lake Superior Region for years to come.

# ADVANCED RAPTOR IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP WITH BILL CLARK

SAVE THE DATE! OCTOBER 4-6, 2013

Bill Clark is returning to Hawk Ridge teach another Advanced Raptor Identification Weekend Workshop October 4-6, 2013! Cost of the workshop is \$175 per person and limited to 25 people. Pre-registration is encouraged to save your spot by sending an email to [jloug@hawkridge.org](mailto:jloug@hawkridge.org).

Bill Clark is a photographer, author, researcher, and lecturer and has over 45 years experience working with birds

of prey, including 5 years as Director of NWF's Raptor Information Center. He has published numerous articles on raptor subjects; has traveled extensively world-wide studying, observing, and photographing raptors; and regularly leads raptor and birding tours and workshops, both home and abroad, with his company, Raptours.

## 2012 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD TO LAURA ERICKSON

Since 2003, Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory has given an award to seven individuals for exceptional achievements for bird conservation, including activities at Hawk Ridge. The 2012 recipient is known in Duluth as the "bird lady". If you have any question about birds, you know who to go to for a knowledgeable answer. It is Laura Erickson and HRBO gratefully gave her the Hawk Ridge Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2012 Annual Meeting.

Laura started her career as a school teacher and has been teaching about birds in an amazing variety of venues and media ever since. Some examples:

### RADIO

a long-running show on public radio "For the Birds".

### BOOK

several over the years, including "Twelve Owls" and "Hawk Ridge: Minnesota's Birds of Prey", both by the University of Minnesota Press.

Magazines – articles in "BirdWatching" and an editor for several years for "Bird Scope" for the Cornell Lab for Ornithology.

Lectures – so many that getting on her calendar is difficult. One recent example is a "Focus on Diversity" sponsored by

the "Fledging Birders Institute".

**Field trips – many, including some locally for Hawk Ridge and Sax-Zim Bog.**

Laura has had a long-time direct connection with Hawk Ridge. She was a part-time counter in 1984 and also 1999 with many other volunteer activities in other years. In the 1980's she was the main counter, for passerines as well as raptors, at the Lakewood Pumping Station; the count was sponsored by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife

Service. It led to a paper "Daytime warbler migration in fall along Lake superior's North Shore" which won Laura an award for the best student paper at a joint Cooper's and Wilson's Society meeting in 1991.

The Hawk Ridge Lifetime Achievement award was presented with a framed bird photo of a Black-capped Chickadee and heart-felt thanks to Laura for all that she does for birds – past and future.



New Hawk Ridge book launch events were a success! Book author, Laura Erickson (left), and artist, Betsy Bowen (right)

Photo by Joe Palgill



# PASSERINE BANDING VOLUNTEER PROGRAM 2012

by KAITLIN AND MATTI ERPESTAD



Kaitlin (right) and Matti Erpestad (left) teaching passerine (songbird) banding program

Fall 2012 saw the pilot year of the Passerine Banding Volunteer Training Program at Hawk Ridge, thanks to grant funding from the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation (Biodiversity Fund). According to pilot year project coordinators, Matti and Kaitlin Erpestad, the program was a huge success. Thirteen volunteers joined the program and contributed 300 hours



Band of banders (from left to right): Matti Erpestad, Margie Menzies, Abbie Valine, Jackie Ramsey, Grace Glick, and Katie Swanson

of volunteer time. The program focused on three areas: research, training, and education. The project's 13 volunteers were trained in the various tasks of passerine (songbird) banding, such as: observing the process, scribing, net-picking, ID-ing,

ageing, sexing, and banding the songbirds. Volunteers worked with Dave Alexander, Annmarie Geniusz, and Kaitlin and Matti at the passerine banding research station.

Visitors of all ages had the opportunity to see the banding process up close and personal at the Hawk Ridge Main Overlook during public educational demonstrations on the weekends, where additional passerines were banded and the banding process was described in detail. 154 total birds of 15 species were banded at the Overlook nets for education. Young children were especially drawn to the banding demonstrations, sometimes ignoring Red-tailed hawks and other raptors in the hand as they waited to see what type of passerine would be banded next. One highlight of the overlook educational banding was catching an adult male Nashville Warbler on the last day of the educational banding season, October 20th, after we hadn't seen a Nashville Warbler for more than three weeks! The hardy Nashville was adopted out and then released to continue his journey south.



Passerine Banding Volunteer in training, Annie Bracey (left), with project coordinator, Matti Erpestad(right)

Thanks to all who stopped by to view an educational banding demonstration at the Overlook, attended one of the public passerine banding programs at the Overlook, and adopted passerines this fall—you all helped make this pilot year a success. And, a special thanks to this year's wonderful volunteers!

Photos courtesy of Kaitlin Erpestad



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*Naturally Avian (Erik Bruhnke)*

*Radisson Hotel Downtown Duluth*

*@michaelfurtman.com (Michael Furtman)*

## HAWK WEEKEND FESTIVAL 2013!

Make plans now for our annual Hawk Weekend Festival the weekend of September 20-22, 2013! Our evening events will be held at the NEW Grand Chalet at Spirit Mountain Recreation Area. On Friday night, our featured guest speaker is Dr. Keith Bildstein who is well known for his raptor research and as the Sarkis Acopian Director of Conservation Science at the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Kempton, PA. The Saturday evening fundraiser will feature a silent & live auction, raffle, and Norman Smith as our guest speaker. Norman is the Director of Massachusetts Audubon's Blue Hills Trailside Museum and Norman Smith Environmental Education Center. Norman has studied birds of prey for over 40 years, including research on snowy owls and rehabilitation and successfully fostering over 1,000 orphaned hawk and owl chicks into adoptive nests. The full registration includes meals both nights, field trips on Saturday & Sunday, and admission to an "Advanced Hawkwatching" workshop at

the Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve. Blocks of rooms are reserved for Hawk Weekend participants at area hotels. Details will be on our website at [www.hawkridge.org](http://www.hawkridge.org).



**Broad-winged Hawk migration typically peaks mid-September at Hawk Ridge!**

*Photo by Chris Neri*