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Taking Flight: News From The Ridge

Fall/Winter Issue | 2009-2010



Northern Hawk Owl by Janet C. Green



Northern Hawk Owl Photo by michaelfurtman.com

At Hawk Ridge seeing a Northern Hawk Owl perched early in the morning and over a week later one flying along the ridge during the official hawk count were some of the highlights of the fall 2009 season. The first observation was on Oct. 22 by several people along the Skyline Parkway and the second was counted about 5 p.m. on Oct. 31. Both were precursors of a winter hawk owl event.

Such observations on the Ridge are so rare that Northern Hawk Owl is not even on the list of raptors officially

reported from Hawk Ridge although other birds have been seen there in the past. Frank Nicoletti, as lead counter, documented three records: Oct. 23, 1991 at 7:10 a.m. near the lookout; Oct. 24, 1996 migrating in late afternoon and Nov. 11, 2004 at 9:10 a.m. migrating down the ridge. Also, one was trapped in 1991 at the banding station.

All these records were in years when there was an invasion of these northern owls into Minnesota. This winter also seems to be a hawk owl invasion with 47 birds reported through the

end of December. As is usual in a minor irruption all of the birds have been found in the northern coniferous forest and peatlands. Mike Hendrickson is compiling hawk owl reports and mapping them on his blog – go to <http://colderbythelakebirding.blogspot.com>.

The Northern Hawk Owl is a circum-boreal species, breeding from Alaska across Canada and through Scandinavia and Siberia. Although it occurs regularly as a winter visitor to Minnesota, its numbers vary drastically each year from one or two to hundreds. Nesting birds are also found irregularly in Minnesota mostly following one of the sporadic irruptions. All nesting records, with the one exception noted, are from counties in the northern coniferous forest and peatlands as

Continued On Page 3

Notes From The Director

By Janelle Long

The fall season brought a wonderful combination of birds and people up to main overlook at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve. Even though my time visiting was minimal, due to having our second baby at the beginning of September, it was comforting to know we have a phenomenal group of staff and volunteers that return each year to share their passion for birds. We appreciate the growing number of yearly visitors – many coming from out-of-state.

As you can read in the newsletter (with more details to come in the Annual Report in March), there were some very special encounters with birds this fall. Thanks to major funding from the Minnesota Power Foundation, a new observation platform offers spectacular views for the counters and visitors. The Donald M. Weesner Foundation helped bus many students to Hawk Ridge to witness what they learned about as fourth graders from their Raptors in the Classroom program. Raptors in the Classroom will continue to be delivered this winter and spring with partial funding from the Duluth-Superior Area Community Foundation Lone Wolf Fund and donors. Please consider sponsoring a lesson for this program, so we can reach out to more students in the region.

You can also check out all the exciting new membership benefits on our website at www.hawkridge.org. Giving a membership or adopting a bird makes a great gift for someone. You can even recognize someone special by giving a donation or renewing your membership in honor of them. We truly thank you for your support and we hope you can join us at the HMANA conference in April!



Yearly visitors from MI & PA return. Photo by Hawk Ridge Staff.

Coming Events!

Hawk Ridge Hosts 2010 HMANA Annual Conference

Hawk Ridge is pleased to announce that we will be hosting the 2010 Conference for the membership of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) this coming April. The conference opens on Thurs., April 15 through Sun., April 18. We'll have something for everyone... guided field trips to local birding hotspots (Sax-Zim Bog, Crex Meadows, Wisconsin Point, the St. Louis River Estuary, and of course, our spring Hawk Count Site), HMANA board and membership business meeting, scientific speakers, a poster session, and evening socials featuring delicious dinners and fascinating speakers.



Continued On Page 8

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory
 P.O. Box 3006
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Call: 218.428.6209
 Contact: mail@hawkridge.org
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INSIDE

Migration Highlights Raptors	p. 2
Aldo's Story	p. 3
Northern Hawk Owl	p. 3
Migration Highlights Non-Raptors	p. 4
Comments from the Board	p. 4
Get Involved	p. 5
Volunteer Report	p. 5
Raptors in Winter	p. 6
2010 Owl Monitoring	p. 7
Banding Oddities	p. 8
More than Raptors	p. 9
Gyrfalcon Banded	p. 10
Hawk Weekend Report	p. 11
Notes From The Director	p. 12

Migration Highlights -- RAPTORS

By Karl Bardon



Peregrine Falcon
Photo by Erik Bruhnke

Fall 2009 marks the 38th consecutive year that a full-time raptor count has been done from the main overlook at Hawk Ridge, but it is the first year that we have counted from our new observation platform! Although the total of 49,519 raptors counted this season is below average, it was a great fall with many highlights, and many changes in the weather from month to month:

August

Weather this month continued the pattern from a very cool summer, with frequent cold fronts and cool temperatures, and perhaps as a result, the total of 2,565 raptors was a record for August at Hawk Ridge. Very surprising was the Rough-legged passing by on Oct. 30, only the second time this species has been seen in August at Hawk Ridge.

September

In a complete turnaround from August, this month was warm and sunny virtually every day with no rain days and generally light winds! The Broad-winged Hawk count was lower than average with a peak of only 7,730 on Sept. 14. Merlins, however, were much more prevalent than average, with repeated daily attacks at the owl decoys, and an eventual seasonal tally of 359. Even more noteworthy, the 116 Peregrine Falcons tallied for the entire season was a record for Hawk Ridge: several

were seen attacking the owl decoy, and one was even seen carrying a Sharp-shinned Hawk in its talons!

October

In another complete turnaround from the previous month, October was much cooler than average with several snow events and poor migration weather until Halloween when a wonderful flight of 1,134 Red-tails and 28 Northern Goshawks occurred. A spectacular three-day flight of 63 Golden Eagles from Oct. 17-19 helped bring the season's total to 224 individuals, a record season for Hawk Ridge. The highlight of the season was the immature gray morph Gyrfalcon trapped by Frank Nicoletti on Oct. 9.

November

Yep, you guessed it—this month was yet again completely the opposite of the previous month, since throughout November temperatures seemed milder than October. We frequently didn't need hats or gloves—or even or shoes—and I never once craved the hot chocolate that was a daily need in October. These mild conditions allowed several species to continue migration later than normal, including record late Broad-winged Hawks on Nov. 5 and Nov. 15! Nonetheless, late season eagles, Rough-leggeds, and Northern Goshawks moved anyway, including a peak of 296 Bald Eagles on Nov. 5.

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Help Fund Education Programs

- \$125 for a 4th Grade Outreach lesson: "Raptors in the Classroom"
- \$175 for a 5th Grade Lesson: "Experience Hawk Ridge"
- \$150 for the Yellow Bus Fund

Help Fund Research (per day)

- \$125 Raptor Banding
- \$80 Raptor Count
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- \$75 Songbird Banding

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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Hawk Weekend Report

Once again, participants in the annual Hawk Weekend had a wonderful two days of discovery and enjoyment by participating in programs, evening lectures, and field trips, as well as watching birds at Hawk Ridge.

On Friday evening, Carrol Henderson, author of *Birds in Flight*, shared with the audience of more than 100 people, the physics of bird flight through stories and wonderful photos.

On Saturday evening, the Silent Auction raised more than \$2,000 to support HRBO activities and Dr. Pat Redig, co-founder of The Raptor Center, regaled the audience

of more than 100 with stories of the early development of raptor research and the creation of The Raptor Center.

For more details about Hawk Weekend, go to www.hawkridge.org or contact us at 218.428.6209 or mail@hawkridge.org.

Please join us next fall during the weekend of September 17-19, 2010, for Hawk Weekend.

Gyr Falcon Banded in Lakewood Township

By Frank Nicoletti

While banding raptors at the Moose Valley Farm banding station, in Lakewood Township, my assistant Andrew Longtin and I captured and banded a hatch year female Gyr Falcon on Oct. 9, 2009. Ironically, moments earlier we had been talking about Gyrs and how incredible it would be to capture one!

I have been banding raptors for 25 years at various locations and never witnessed this species in a banding

station, although I have seen one during winter trapping 20 years ago. Andrew had mentioned during our conversation prior to capturing the Gyr that he had never seen a Gyr and to see one in the hand would be great thrill, a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence.

Moments later, he said in a sharp, quick voice, "Coming in." Reacting to his alarm, I started to bring the lure in to the trap while looking for the incoming raptor. Noticing that

it was a large falcon, I played the lure as if expecting it to be a Peregrine. But after it made the first pass I realized it was a Gyr. It made several passes on the lure before I triggered the trap. As my wife reported to Sam Cook, "This is the one bird he loves more than anything." She was so right. What an exciting day!

After banding and taking measurements, the bird was viewed by more than 50 birders who were able to witness this stunning raptor. Eric Bruhnke, HRBO Count Interpreter, was chosen by the staff to release the bird and was quoted as saying, "To have such an elusive bird not only seen but caught, it's beyond rare."

These arctic visitors, seldom seen in Duluth, have not been banded in the fall since 1991.

Aldo's Story: How I Became a Bird Counter

By Aldo Raul Contreras Reyes, Intro by Janelle Long

Aldo Raul Contreras Reyes joined Hawk Ridge this fall as a volunteer counter. He was very enthusiastic to come to Duluth, Minn. to see many of the northern raptor species, such as the Northern Goshawk. Aldo is from the town of Chavarrillo, in the state of Veracruz, Mexico.

Here is Aldo's account of becoming a bird counter: On my third day as a member of the partnership of Cafaselva, we received a group of birders from the city of Xalapa, Veracruz. I asked my uncle, "What do I have to do today?" He answered, "Could you bring water to the birdwatchers?" I answered, "Only water!" And he told me, "Yes!"

As I walked along the path to where the birdwatchers were, I looked around, wondering, 'Is this the work of a birding guide, bringing water?' I kept walking and questioning. When I got to the place where the people

were watching birds, I began to listen. They named the birds with funny names.

I stayed there for an hour, listening to these people speaking in English and saying weird things and drawing birds. While they watched the birds, I remained silent and attentive to any movement in the bushes, and suddenly, I found a superbly beautiful bird that I had not seen in my life before. I cried out loud saying, "Look at that bird in the middle of the bushes!"

When I screamed, everyone turned to me and one of them asked me in Spanish, "Do you like bird watching?" I told him, "Of course!" He asked me, "Do you kill them?" I remember I told him with a serious look, "Of course! I kill them to eat them, because their meat is very good." He asked again, "Would you like to learn about birds and not continue killing them?" I replied, "Of course I would like that, but



Aldo counting at Hawk Ridge. Photo by Erik Bruhnke

who would teach me." He told me, "I can teach you!"

To learn about the birds was an interesting process. I had to get up early and live much of the time in the field, not to hunt but to observe the birds in order to identify them. This process was very important to my friend Robert John Straub, who has continued to assist me in learning. From then on, I saw the great importance to the community to know, appreciate and

Continued On Page 7



Gyr Falcon photos by Erik Bruhnke

Northern Hawk Owl

continued



Hawk Owl migrating past Hawk Ridge. Photo by Erik Bruhnke

follows: Roseau 1906, 1987, 2006 (two); Lake of the Woods 1980; Beltrami 2006; Koochiching 2001, 2006 (three); St. Louis 1963, 1992, 2001, 2006 (three); Aitkin 1980; Lake 1988, 2001 (two), 2006 (three), Cook 2001, 2006 (three) and Norman, 1884, the distributional exception..

The increase in breeding records in the last three decades is most likely the result of more extensive bird watching and documentation. In these same decades there have been five major irruptions: 1991-92; 1996-97; 2000-01; 2004-05; 2005-06 and three minor ones: 1990-91; 1995-96; and 2001-02 (Grosshuesch, 2006, Loon

80:180-187. Earlier, one major influx was documented in 1962-63 (Green, 1963; Flicker 35:77-78). However, there is sufficient anecdotal evidence in the north central states of

noteworthy winter irruptions going back to the late 19th century to suggest that these periodic irruptions are inherent in the hawk owl's breeding biology.

In their species account in Cornell's Birds of North America Online, Duncan and Duncan (1998) describe the hawk owl's breeding and migration relationships. They state that it "leads nomadic life, dispersing extensively within its breeding range in response to regional food availability and therefore to climatic conditions. Populations . . . follow closely the cycles of rodent prey, but hare cycles appear also to be important.

. . . When prey levels are adequate, Northern Hawk Owl breeds and winters within northern forests, yet high vole abundance can result in temporary southward extensions of its breeding range. . . . Irruption may occur when vole populations crash at 3-to 5 yr. intervals."

For bird watchers in northern Minnesota spotting a hawk owl on the top of a dead stub enlivens a cold and sometimes bleak winter. The bird is aptly named because, unlike most owls, it hunts during the daytime, perches in the open, flies fast like an accipiter and hovers like a kestrel. The best place to find one is in the bog and forest country in Aitkin County, central St. Louis County, central Lake County, Koochiching and Beltrami Counties. This winter get out and enjoy the winter woods, stay warm and don't get stuck in the snow.

Migration Highlights - Non-Raptors

Compiled by Jan Green from Karl Bardon's daily reports

The fall of 2009 was the third year that counting has been done at Hawk Ridge for other species besides raptors. HRBO is lucky to have as lead counter Karl Bardon, whose expertise in bird identification covers all species. Also, the counting of non-raptors at Hawk Ridge provides an important baseline for the duration and magnitude of migration; it is part of wider research that is studying migration along Minnesota's North Shore to develop good land use planning for any future wind development. The phenomenon of diurnal passerine migration at Hawk Ridge and its magnitude has been illuminated by these counts and adds more excitement to bird watching on Hawk Ridge.

These are some of the highlights from 2009.

August

American White Pelican – 29 on the 26th
Common Nighthawk – 13,154 on the 25th
Cliff Swallow – 2,793 on the 18th

September

Ross's Goose – 2 on the 23rd
Cackling Goose – 58 on the 26th
Sandhill Crane – 154 on the 29th
Blue Jay – total of 22,652 from the 6th to 15th; peak of 3,642 on the 14th
American Pipit – 75 on the 24th

Cedar Waxwing – 3,421 on the 6th
Warblers (7 species id.) – 1,046 on the 14th
Warblers (5 species id.) – 1,827 on the 17th
Warblers (mostly Yellow-rumps) – 7,486 on the 28th
Bobolink – 39 on the 9th

October

Black-backed Woodpecker – total of 11 from the 8th to 27th
American Crow – 3,063 on the 14th
American Robin – total of 40,045 from the 9th to 31st; peak of 14,817 the 31st
Lapland Longspur – 50 on the 4th

Rusty blackbird – total of 4,137 from the 5th to 31st; peak of 1,447 on the 19th
Purple Finch – 845 on the 19th

November

Tundra Swan – 94 on the 26th
Common Raven – 118 on the 7th
Bohemian Waxwing – 37 on the 10th
Snow Bunting – 105 on the 5th
Pine Grosbeak – 84 on the 16th
Red Crossbill – 44 on the 5th
White-winged Crossbill – 463 on the 8th
Common Redpoll – 562 on the 16th
Pine Siskin – 721 on the 16th
American Goldfinch – 338 on the 8th



Migrating American Robins Photo by Erik Bruknke

Comments From The Board

By Tim Bates, Chair

In its efforts to build capacity, the Board of Directors has voted to expand the number of board members. This will allow for a greater diversity of skills on the board to help the organization improve our ability to connect with constituents and raise money for the long-term sustainability of the organization.

At the fall member meeting (during Hawk Weekend), the membership re-elected Molly Thompson, Doug Lewis, Erica Sivertson, and Ray Gamache to continue to serve on the Board of Directors.

The Board meets on a bi-monthly basis with committee meetings occurring on the intervening months. If you have comments or suggestions for the Board, please send them to tbates@hawkridge.org.

More than just raptors:

The Full Magnitude of the North Shore Migration By Anna Peterson

The North Shore fall migration project successfully completed its second year of data collection in November. Four researchers from Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory and the University of Minnesota-Duluth spent the fall observing migratory bird movement between Duluth and Grand Portage, Minnesota.

Along with the usual observation sites that include Pincushion Mountain, Wolf Rock on the Superior Hiking

Trail, and the Grand Portage fire tower, Lutsen Mountain granted access to the Moose Mountain chalet which gave a fantastic view of migrating birds traveling along the shoreline and over Eagle Mountain.

Additionally, through the generosity of two Duluth residents' access to yard space and the rental of a 45-foot boom lift, a near unobstructed view of migrating birds was achieved near Duluth. Thanks to these views

and lucky timing, observers made surprising discoveries this season about the North Shore migration.

The first discovery was that the daily movement of birds starts before sunrise. Masses of birds were observed as shadows just above the tree canopy as the sun rose above Lake Superior. The next discovery came when researchers began recording the direction in which the birds were flying.

Many birds were not moving down the shore of Lake Superior as expected, but were moving directly inland from the shoreline. This movement may be an intentional movement away from habitats near shore to avoid competition with other birds or to avoid getting caught over the water during the next southbound flight.

One of the most important discoveries of the season was the sheer number of birds moving in the Lake Superior coastal region. Researchers estimate that along with the thousands of raptors such as Bald and Golden Eagles moving within the Lake Superior coastal region, millions of other birds that include thousands of Rusty Blackbirds, Common Nighthawks, and Yellow-rumped Warblers are participating in this same movement.

With two years of fall migration data collected and one more migration season to go, researchers expect to find the magnitude of our North Shore bird migration has been underestimated and represents one of the largest non-maritime concentrations of migrating birds in the nation.



Counting birds on the lift. Photo by Anne Balogh

Banding Oddities

By David L. Evans

In the course of our banding activities we occasionally encounter birds with abnormalities and injuries. Many, if not most, can be attributed to the effects of various forms of trauma such as bites on legs and feet, eye injuries, infected punctures especially in the feet, impaled sticks, and healed breaks of legs and wings. Much less frequently, we see anomalies that can be attributed to genetic aberrations. Some of these have included misshapen irises (not attributed to injury), atypical number of flight feathers in wing or tail, atypical feathers in inappropriate places, and, as reported here, two anomalies of feet or legs.

On Oct. 13, 2009, we caught an immature Saw-whet Owl with an unusual right foot. On the hallux, or hind toe, there were two normal looking talons both in size and shape, directly adjacent to each other, emerging from the hallux where there should be just one present. They were connected to each other with a whitish substance that, after picking at it, I determined to be fecal urates, most likely crammed in between the two talons during the fledgling period in the nest cavity. The foot, including the hallux with two talons, appeared otherwise normal in form and function. The owl's condition appeared good, its weight (98.5 g) 2.5 grams above average for its size, based on measurements of 1,775 juvenile Saw-whets at the banding station (Evans,



Extra toe on Sharp-shinned Hawk. Photo by David L. Evans

unpubl. data).

On Sept. 30, 2006, we caught an adult male Sharp-shinned Hawk with an unusual deformity: an extra toe-like digit growing out of the inside of the thigh region above the left ankle joint (Fig. 1). The general appearance of the extra toe appeared most similar to a normal hallux, or hind toe. It was complete with dorsal scales, a rudimentary toe pad, and a fully developed talon. The hawk appeared incapable of manipulating the toe, but we were able to move the toe from side to side to a very limited degree (approx. 5 mm in either direction horizontally). Through our attempts at manipulating the digit, we concluded that the toe was comprised of a single solid bone and that the talon itself could not be contracted, in contrast to a normal talon. The bird

was aged as after-hatch year (AHY) based on plumage, but was likely a second-year (SY) bird based on eye color (which is not definitive for ageing purposes). Thus, it was at least one year old, suggesting that the deformity was not substantially affecting the bird's survival. It had undergone a complete molt with no apparent fault bars and its weight, 100.0 g, was 6.0 g above average for its size, based on measurements of 1,890 AHY male Sharp-shins at the banding station (Evans, unpubl. data). It was captured at the approximate median date of adult male migration (Rosenfield and Evans 1980, Loon 52:66-69).

Shawn Hawks and Sacha Mkhaidze contributed to this note, and we thank the many people who have helped with the research activities at the banding station.

For more information, contact Julie O'Connor, Conference Coordinator, at hmana2010@aol.com or 218-348-2291.

We need help hosting this conference! If you're interested in volunteering some time, please contact Julie as soon as possible. See you there!

research throughout North America, and our guess is that you'll have made some new friends and added a few hawk watch sites to your 'must see' list!

You can register online at www.hawkridge.org/events/HMANA/register (online registration or download/mail-in form) or via phone: 218-348-2291.

HMANA Conference

continued

We invite you to join us in April! All Hawk Ridge members are encouraged to attend and we'd love to have a good showing of Hawk Ridge members to welcome HMANA members to Duluth.

By the end of the weekend, you'll be up to speed on ongoing raptor

Volunteer Report by Julie O'Connor

Each July I begin thinking about the upcoming volunteer season, planning our return volunteer potluck and new volunteer training sessions, as well as distributing fliers and sending announcements to recruit new faces. It's a time of anticipation and growing excitement as I prepare to bring new people into our organization. Our established volunteers are fully trained and able to get each new season up and running, and they are an important part of the on-site training for our new volunteers.

We skim from the best in our community and get the cream of the crop to volunteer with us! We are privileged to spend each September and October in the presence of people who are givers and who know the value of investing time and energy back into their community. Our volunteer ranks include elementary, high school and college students, working professionals, people in

transition, stay-at-home parents and retirees. We have volunteers who live within a mile of Hawk Ridge and others who drive great distances to spend a weekend or two volunteering with us. As a group, they are high quality people who are committing their time to our organization, and we can't thank them enough!

This fall, our volunteers invested more than 2,000 hours at the main overlook and hawk count site. The Bureau of Labor Statistics places a value of \$20.25 for each hour of volunteer labor, which means that our volunteers have contributed more than \$40,000 worth of "in-kind" donations to Hawk Ridge!

We are so grateful to, and humbled by, our volunteers. I hope that you, our members, appreciate the gift these people give to us—we couldn't possibly provide the programming, information, service and interpretation



Volunteer Sydney Blackmore in Red-tailed Hawk costume releasing Red-tailed Hawk. Photo by Hawk Ridge Staff.

we do without this group of wonderful people. THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS! If YOU are interested in volunteering with us next fall, contact volunteer coordinator Julie O'Connor at joconnor@hawkridge.org or 218-348-2291.

Duluth Raptor Nesting Survey

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory is conducting a citizen-science based Raptor Nesting Survey within the city of Duluth, Minn. If you live in Duluth, please keep your eyes and ears

alert for nesting raptors in your neighborhood. If you find a nest or believe there is a nearby raptor nest, please submit your information about the nest location and raptor species online at

<http://www.hawkridge.org/research/nesting.html>. If you have further questions on the project, you can also contact Frank Nicoletti at 218-591-0174 or fnicoletti@hawkridge.org.

Want to Get Involved?

Hawk Ridge benefits from the skills, experience and energy of our volunteers. We couldn't do what we do without our incredible volunteers.

Contact Volunteer Coordinator Julie O'Connor if any of the following opportunities tickle your fancy: joconnor@hawkridge.org or 218-348-2291

HMANA Conference:

Help facilitate the smooth execution of this upcoming national conference. We need people on our planning team as well as on the ground at the conference during the weekend of April 15-18, 2010.

2010 Spring Owl Monitoring:

Our monitors will be out and about listening for calling owls on their assigned routes in late March/early April. We still have open routes throughout the state, particularly in western Minnesota. We'll be assigning routes in February, so contact Julie

NOW if you want to get onboard!

2010 Peregrine Watch:

It's not too soon to start planning your June leisure activity... and how about joining us to watch our local peregrines raise this year's brood of chicks?!?! Peregrine Watch opens to the public on Memorial Day weekend, but we'll start keeping an eye on the nest in late March/early April to get an idea of when the female starts incubating her eggs. We've got new equipment to use this season, so we'll have the ability to watch the female while she's inside the nest!

Office Assistant:

Janelle Long, Executive Director, is always looking for reliable, regular help in the office with daily business and office work. If you can commit to a consistent schedule, please contact Janelle directly: jljong@hawkridge.org or 218-428-6209.

Raptors in Winter: Our Northern Owls

by Debbie Waters

Winter is definitely upon us, and I, for one, am thankful for living in the north. Yes, I love to backcountry ski, snowshoe, hike up frozen rivers and all that wintery fun, but it's the winter raptors that make living in the north something truly special. It's time for owling!

I'm sure you've all heard about the big "owl invasion" of the 2004-2005 winter—close to 6,000 Great Gray Owls and hundreds of Northern Hawk Owls and Boreal Owls moved from their northern breeding range into Minnesota and the northern tier of states. What most people don't realize is that we get some northern owls—Great Gray Owls, Northern Hawk Owls, Snowy Owls and Boreal Owls—every winter!

Finding them can be the toughest part, but it helps to know what to look for and where to look. Great Gray

Northern Hawk Owl photo by michaelfurtman.com



Great Gray Owl photo by michaelfurtman.com

Owls and Northern Hawk Owls tend to be the easiest to find, since they will perch out in the open; those are the two species I'm going to focus on here.

Look for Northern Hawk Owls perched at the very tops of the tallest trees or even telephone poles—they look like a blob with a long tail. Northern Hawk Owls are quite active during the daytime. Great Gray Owls tend to perch a bit lower than canopy height, often in the low branches of a tall tree or at the top of a low tree or snag, especially at the edge of a forest opening. Often individuals of each of these species will "park" in a particular area for the winter, so checking birding hotlines for reports can often pay off, especially in January and February.

What to do once you find an owl? Marvel at it, right? Of course! But there are other things you should know while you're pondering the grace and mystery of an owl. Remember what I said about an owl "parking" somewhere? Well, you're not going to be the only person that visits that owl; in fact, an owl could potentially be viewed by hundreds of people. The following tips will keep disturbance of the owl to a minimum and keep everyone happy.

Your goal while owling should be to observe, not disturb. Stay in your car—it makes a great blind—a good distance from the owl. Cut your engine and keep noise to a minimum. The owl may very well be trying to hunt or sleep. Take a lot of photos and whisper, "wow!" and "amazing" and "cool!" over and over.

Last winter during an owling trip, another birder drove up and stopped on the road right alongside our parked vehicles...where we were watching a perched Great Gray Owl. The owl flushed, not to be refund. While you are out driving around looking for owls, please also be respectful of other birders. Take special care not to flush the owl (or any other bird they're watching)—stay back, try to locate the bird and approach very slowly if possible. Your fellow birders will be grateful, and you will also benefit by getting to marvel at a perched owl instead of glimpsing a tail disappearing into the forest.

Want to learn more about our northern owls? Check out David Benson's *Owls of the North: A Naturalist's Handbook*. It's a small, easy-to-read, jam-packed book with natural history information, beautiful photography, cool facts and Dave's quirky humor. Good owling!



Great Gray Owl photo by michaelfurtman.com

2010 Owl Monitoring

It's not too early to start thinking about the Spring Owl Monitoring project! As early as mid-February, owls start searching for their mates by calling out during the night. In April, owl monitoring volunteers all over Minnesota and Wisconsin will head into the night to their assigned routes to listen for those calling owls.

Routes are 9 miles long with 10 designated stops at one-mile intervals. At each stop, volunteers listen quietly for 5 minutes, then record any owls they hear calling and make notes on environmental conditions. These reports are submitted to Dave Grosshuesch, the project coordinator, who analyzes the data and writes up a report on each year's findings.

If you'd like to learn more about this project, visit our website at: www.hawkridge.org/research/springowl.html. You'll find our protocol, seasonal reports and our certification quiz at the website, as well as instructions for how YOU can become a monitoring volunteer. It's a great excuse to get out and do some owl prowling, so consider becoming an owl route volunteer this year!

Aldo's Story

continued

promote natural and cultural wealth and traditions that exist in Chavarrillo. Some of those are driven by our Rural Community Tourism project Cafaselva, which offers various activities for the community, including bird watching, tours to the forest and jungle, tours of beekeeping, clay or pottery tours, coffee growing workshops, and talks on the history of valuing community, the environment, the typical dance, cuisine, and family (www.cafaselva.com).

In 2005, I served as a raptor counter in the Veracruz River of Raptor monitoring project operated by Pronatura Veracruz. In the spring of 2006, I initiated the first raptor monitoring project in Chavarrillo. In spring the return raptor migration (northward) can be seen in the mountainous area near Chavarrillo, where many of these birds decide to rest. For four consecutive years we have seen thousands of these birds, and on one morning I observed approximately 60,000 Swainson's Hawks flying out from their nocturnal roost to continue

their flight north.

With the support of my family, Cafaselva and Pronatura Veracruz, I have constructed an observation tower for the raptor migration count and the Swainson's Hawk Observatory. Additional support for the project has come from HMANA (Hawk Migration Association of North America) and Pronatura Veracruz. The economic resources that have been raised have gradually been reinvested in training and a modest infrastructure and equipment.

I have done spring migration counts for four consecutive seasons at the Swainson's Hawk Observatory and what I have learned of birds has contributed to making the list of birds of Chavarrillo. I have identified 273 species in Chavarrillo, some of which I have photographed.

A continuing threat to the natural environment of the area comes from the economic crisis faced by coffee growers due to the instability of the price of coffee. This has led to many local farmers converting their "natu-

ral" plantations of shade coffee ("bird friendly") to lime trees, which has drastically reduced the area that was previously productive for a diverse number of species and that previously provided habitat for their food, protection, and reproduction needs. Cafaselva and I are working towards a conservation program for the area of Chavarrillo, which will enable the protection of vegetation, the life of the birds, and that will involve more children from the community. This will also enable the raptor monitoring project to endure.

This year, I had the opportunity to participate as a raptor counter with Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, Minnesota, whom I thank wholeheartedly for the opportunity and friendship. You have a strong institution full of many people interested in learning about birds, and a very dedicated staff that educates many people every day. I found the daily raptor class made many students think more about conservation, and I found this very important. It was a wonderful experience to participate in the autumn count of the birds of prey.