

2016 Raptor Banding Report

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The fall 2016 season marks the 44th year of banding birds at Hawk Ridge and my sixth season managing the program. Hawk Ridge is one of the longest running banding operations in the world, and its continuing efforts to collect data is of utmost importance, especially with the changing climate and shifting of species and weather patterns. We along with other professional organizations and individuals continue to work toward understanding the migration of birds across North and Central America.

From 2011 to 2014 we had the Hawk Ridge, Moose Valley, and Paine Farm banding stations running full time. The Hawk Ridge station maintains full time operation and Paine Farm and Moose Valley are run on a part-time basis, thanks to the help of volunteers. Raptor Bander, Miranda Durbin, and volunteer David Alexander were able to fill in mainly in September and October. We dropped in numbers of days covered the past two years from an average of 235 days from 2011 to 2014 to an average of 179 in 2015 and 2016. Again this season we had two banding trainees, which made the banding operation run more smoothly and provided a great opportunity for the trainees to learn all aspects of banding. We also continue to rely on our great core of volunteers.

The 2016 season proved to be a productive year with a total of 4,261 raptors banded of 16 species. This total includes an amazing 81 foreign recoveries (birds banded at a different banding site and recaptured at Hawk Ridge) and 25 returns (birds previously banded at Hawk Ridge and recaptured at Hawk Ridge), a record number for Hawk Ridge. We are still waiting for information on recoveries (birds banded at Hawk Ridge and recaptured at a different banding site). Among the 4,261 total raptors captured, there were 2,363 diurnal (hawks) and 1,898 nocturnal raptors (owls). The owls were all banded at the main station at Hawk Ridge. The main station for hawk banding was in operation daily from August 15 to November 30. Moose Valley ran from September 4 to November 20, while Paine Farm ran from September 5 to October 19. We logged a total of 170 days, which is well below our overall average of 216 station days since 2011. The average number of raptors banded per day was 25.

The overall migration this fall from a banding perspective was mixed with high and lows. Lack of cold fronts in October and November kept numbers of later season migrants lower than normal. September flights were the best in recent years at the banding stations, especially for Sharp-shinned Hawks.

A total of 2,349 hawks were banded during the fall, with monthly total as follows: 58 in August, 1,884 in September, 382 in October, and 25 in November. Except for September, the rest of the monthly totals were disappointing with numbers below long-term averages. October and November had record or near record warm temperatures and poor trapping conditions. August & November were the lowest monthly totals since 2011.

Of the 2,363 hawks captured, 11 were foreign recoveries and 3 were returns. Most noteworthy of the 8 foreign recoveries of Sharp-shinned Hawks were 3 from Thunder Cape, near Thunder Bay, Ontario, banded within this 2016 season and 1 from Cedar Grove near Green Bay, Wisconsin, banded as a second-year in 2012, making it 5 years old. Very unusual was 1 banded near Santa Rosa, in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, on February 28, 2016. 3 Peregrine Falcons recaptured were from the North Shore of Lake Superior banded as nestlings this summer. All 3 returns were Sharp-shinned Hawks - 2 were from 2015, and 1 was banded in 2012 as an after-second-year individual making it no less than 7 years old.

Owls kept us busy this fall with 1,898 captured, including 70 foreign recoveries and 22 returns. This is the second-largest total of owls banded behind the 2012 season when 2,034 owls were captured. Since 2011 we have followed a protocol using two caller units: one each for Northern Saw-whet (NSWO) and Long-eared owl (LEOW). However, this year we also starting using a Boreal Owl (BOOW) caller, which we will continue to use in the future and may discontinue using the LEOW caller as it seems to be less effective at the main station. Unfortunately, we did not capture any Boreal Owls as we had hoped. All callers run simultaneously during the night. As in previous years, the NSWO caller was placed in the west net lanes. The LEOW caller was placed in the station field while the BOOW caller was placed in the east net (pine grove) lanes.

Amazing were 92 NSOW recoveries (70 foreign and 22 returns), most ever in a season and by far the most numerous species recaptured. Of the 22 returns banded and recaptured at Hawk Ridge were 13 from 2015; 2 from 2014; 2 from 2013; 1 from 2012; 3 from 2011; and 1 from 2009.

Some of the noteworthy NSOW foreign recoveries were 3 from Thunder Cape - 1 each from 2013, 2014, and 2015. Wisconsin banding sites recoveries included Linwood Station, Cedar Grove, and Falls Creek. We also had some from North Shore banding sites (French River, Tofte, Finland, and Wolf Ridge). Most notable was a nestling banded on May 30, 2016, from a nest box near Reva, Harding County, South Dakota. Also unusual were 2 other South Dakota birds both banded during fall migration in 2015.

Many people make the banding stations run smoothly and efficiently. David Alexander and Miranda Durbin helped me staff the banding stations. Alan Moss, a trainee in 2015, worked the night shift at Hawk Ridge banding owls. Allie Pesano and Anna Kennedy, this season's trainees, were much appreciated for their tireless efforts and enthusiasm to learn. I would also like to thank the numerous volunteers

and HRBO staff who helped in many ways, including Karl Bardon, Alex Lamoreaux, and Dave Carman communicating from the hawkwatch and others who helped in the stations, including Gary Leeper, Katie Swanson, Bruce Munson, Grace Glick, Ryan Steiner, Abbie Valine, Stephen Nelson, and Karen Stubenvoll. Thanks to the education staff and volunteers for teaching and inspiring students and other visitors about birds and the bird research conducted at Hawk Ridge. Thanks also to the Hawk Ridge Stewardship Committee for helping with maintenance of the Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve and banding site. Finally, I would especially like to thank my wife Kate for all she does and for her support.