

Hawk Ridge Fall 2017 Bird Migration Count Report

2017 Raptor summary by Karl Bardon

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory conducted its annual hawk count from 15 August-30 November 2017 at the Main Overlook, with a total of 80,130 raptors counted. This is the best season total since 2003. The highlight of the season was the amazing number of Rough-legged Hawks counted- the total of 1123 Rough-legs is a new season record for the Ridge, and the peak of 322 on 25 October is a new daily record as well. Perhaps not surprisingly, Bald Eagles also had their best season yet, with a total of 6,099 seen. The count of 22,163 Sharp-shinned Hawks was second only to last year, when 22,602 were seen. The number of Turkey Vultures, Cooper's Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, Golden Eagles, Merlins, and Peregrine Falcons were all above average, while the number of Ospreys, Northern Harriers, Northern Goshawks, Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels were all below average.

The team of counters at Hawk Ridge continues to inspire. Alex Lamoreaux and Stephen Nelson manned the Ridge throughout the season, with invaluable help from Steve Kolbe, Andrew Longtin, Todd Whitesel, Jane Hosking, Joe Beck, Larry Snyder, Jan and Larry Kraemer, John Richardson, Hannah Toutonghi, Tom Reed, Russ Edmonds, Clinton Nienhaus, Kathleen MacAulay, Sasha Munters, Adam Sell, Ben Yokel, Dick Green, Dick DeCoster, Kate Maley, Nick Wagner, and Mark Dudek Johnson. Special thanks to Steve Kolbe and Tom Reed for helping to count on the Shore.

2017 non-raptor summary by Karl Bardon

For the Eleventh year in a row, a full-time non-raptor count was completed at Hawk Ridge, and for the eighth year in a row, an additional simultaneous morning count near the shore of Lake Superior was also included to give a more full account of the total migration. The results were 380,160 migrant non-raptors, including 218,961 on the shore and 161,199 on the Ridge. This total is slightly above average, and includes many highlights, including a peak day of 70,984 birds on 28 September, one of the biggest days ever for these counts.

Although we do not generally see large numbers of waterfowl along the North Shore of Lake Superior, many species of waterbirds had a record season. Counts of 11,206 Canada Geese, 535 Mallards, 20 Canvasback, 96 Ring-necked Ducks, 73 Lesser Scaup, 8 Surf Scoters, 14 Black Scoters, and 235 Red-breasted Mergansers were all the highest season totals to date for these species. Similarly, the counts of 3 Pacific Loons, 116 Common Loons, and 53 Great Blue Herons were all seasonal highs. Perhaps most noteworthy, the number of Sandhill Cranes migrating over Hawk Ridge continues to increase every year, and the total of 1246 was the best season so far. In contrast, most shorebird species were seen in only average numbers. Although Parasitic Jaegers had been seen only twice from the Ridge previously, this season a total of six were seen!

One of the highlights of the season was the amazing number of woodpeckers that migrated south, especially the record invasion of Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers. This fall's totals of 337 Black-backed and 12 American Three-toeds is way beyond the previous best season of 83 Black-backed and 5 American Three-toeds in 2007, but counting was only done from Hawk Ridge in 2007. For comparison, the 2017 total included 110 Black-backed Woodpeckers from Hawk Ridge and 227 seen along the Shore. The peak day was 41 Black-backed on 9 October 2017. It was a record year for other woodpeckers as well, including a high season total of 1615 Northern Flickers, with a peak of 621 flickers on 28 September.

As with a number of other species, the counts of Common Ravens continue to increase at Hawk Ridge; this fall's count of 2641 was a new seasonal high. Season counts of 62 Northern Shrikes, 54 Blue-headed Vireos, 23 Philadelphia Vireos, 532 Horned Larks, 768 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 5 Townsend's Solitaires, and 439 Bohemian Waxwings were all records, though the reasons for increase is such a diverse number of birds remains unknown.

The number of warblers counted continues to remain exceptional; during the last three seasons 2015-2017, the average warbler count has been about 75,000 individuals, which is three times higher than the average of about 25,000 warblers counted from 2010-2013, with similar counting methods used during all these years. The peak day this fall was on 28 September when 25,345 warblers were counted, including 14,676 Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Both Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins started migrating along the shore in late July, and the Red Crossbill migration continued throughout the season, peaking at an amazing 1468 individuals on 22 October, and bringing the season total to 4903 individuals. This edges out the previous invasion of 4517 Red Crossbills in 2012, which occurred mostly in August, peaking at 1252 on 24 August 2012. It was a good season for most other finches as well, including 1297 Pine Grosbeaks, 26,824 Common Redpolls, and 27,125 Pine Siskins.