

West Skyline Spring Count Summary 2020 By Frank Nicoletti

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory conducted the West Skyline Spring Count from February 29 through May 31, 2020. This is the third year of the planned 10-year, full-time consecutive spring count, with thanks to a generous donation. The same protocol was used this season, as in past years with the use of two count sites depending of wind direction. These counts and data can be viewed real-time online through the Dunkadoo database, as well as raptor count on hawkcount.org. A summary and total of birds counted were also entered into the eBird database each day.

A total of 19,217 raptors were counted of 16 species observed during of 91 days covered out of 93 possible. The two days not covered were due to inclement weather. A total of 574.5 hours were covered giving an average of just over 6 hours per day. The hawk per day and hourly rate was 211 and 33, respectfully.

This season's total raptor count of 19,217 was the second lowest of full-time coverage (14,992 recorded in 2009 was lowest) and is well below the average of 26,000+. Most species were recorded in lower then normal numbers with the exception of Peregrine Falcon, which established new daily and seasonal records. It's unclear at this point why the numbers were well below the 2000-2005 averages, which is currently the most complete set of data we can compare to. Certainly, weather patterns are somewhat to blame, as we had almost no southerly winds. Northerly winds prevailed, especially during the peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration. Broad-wing Hawk were almost 10,000 down, which would have brought our numbers up to the previous season totals. This was also seen on other western Great Lakes counts, such as Whitefish Point and Brockway Mountain. The species which have shown steady increases in fall counts, such as Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, were recorded in good numbers this spring.

Some of the highlights this spring were the following: 5 Swainson's Hawk, one adult dark morph Broad-winged Hawk, adult light morph Harlan's and adult Krider's, were all special for sure. Also unique was the peak flight of Bald Eagle in May, which has always been in the month of March. We recorded 407 Bald Eagles on May 27, which is an impressive number anytime.

COVID-19 definitely had an impact on our visitation and programs planned, including canceling our Spring Migration Celebration, but we still had visitors (birders and general public) who came out to safely view the spectacular migration. John Richardson did a great job teaching about and interpreting the spring migration to visitors and media, as well as helping conduct the count.

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory is excited to continue gaining knowledge about the spring migration through Duluth and how it compares to the fall counts. This is also

a great way for public outreach and continuing the education of raptor and bird conservation in the Western Great Lakes Region. We truly appreciate your support and hope to see you next spring!

Acknowledgements

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