

West Skyline Hawk Count Summary 2021

By Frank Nicoletti, Spring Count Director



Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory conducted the West Skyline Spring Count from February 22 through May 31, 2021. This is the fourth year of the planned 10-year, full-time consecutive spring count, with thanks to a generous donation. We continue to document and study the spring migration from West Skyline Parkway in Duluth, MN, which is the western-most count on the Great Lakes.

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. The count was conducted for 90 days during the spring with 9 days not covered, due to inclement weather. A total of 591 hours were logged this season with an average of 6.5 hours per day. A total of 18,157 raptors were counted of 16 species. The average number of raptors counted was 202 per day.



The season total of 18,157 was well below the average of 25,220 since 2018. This is the second season in a row that recorded below average numbers. Weather patterns for each season for the past two years were similar with many north and northeast winds and few warm fronts. These conditions often spread out the flight. Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Golden Eagle, American Kestrel, and Peregrine Falcons were down by 30-60%, which correlated with poor weather conditions when these migrants were moving through. Other regular migrating species numbers were only slightly below average. The exception were Cooper's Hawk and Red-shouldered Hawk with record numbers, 55 and 7, respectfully.



Highlights for raptors included two adult light Harlan's, 3 dark Swainson's Hawk, and 3 adult dark Broad-winged Hawk and 7 Red-shouldered Hawks. We saw nice flights of eagles with over 1,100 Bald and 44 Golden during the period of March 20-22. Of course, watching the raptors migrating daily is always a highlight. The non-raptor migration from the overlook never really materialized this season, although some efforts were made to get there early. However, some species of note included Cackling and Greater White-fronted Geese, Red-throated Loons, Snowy Egret, Whimbrels, Willet and Townsend's Solitaire.



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 were able to safely hold a Spring Migration Workshop in April led by Education Director, Margie Menzies. It was wonderful to see many visitors out enjoying the migration with us. Hopefully, the pandemic will continue to subside and we'll connect with even more people during the fall migration and again in spring 2022. We truly appreciate your support and hope to see you soon!

Acknowledgements

Many helped with the count and I truly appreciate their contributions. A special thanks to Ralph Larsen, John Edwards, Ed Longhway, Dave Carman, Hannah Toutonghi, Steve Kolbe and Erik Bruhnke for your time volunteering.

Turkey Vulture-2541
Osprey-145
Bald Eagle-5070
Northern Harrier-62
Sharp-shinned Hawk-1525
Cooper's Hawk-55
Northern Goshawk-6
Red-shouldered Hawk-7
Broad-winged Hawk-5733
Red-tailed Hawk-2542
Swainson's Hawk-3
Rough-legged Hawk-236
Golden Eagle-117
American Kestrel-41
Merlin-58
Peregrine Falcon-12
Total-18,157

