

2020 Raptor Banding Report

Frank Nicoletti, Banding Director

The fall 2020 season marks the 49th year of the raptor banding at Hawk Ridge. This is my tenth season managing the banding operation. 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 are also now working with graduate students from UMD. This year we had four students working on various project which included Isotope, diet, PFAS contaminants, subspecies of Red-tailed Hawks of migrating raptors, and starting this winter, a study on Northern Hawk Owls. 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. This season we had both Hawk Ridge and Moose Valley running full time, while Paine Farm ran when we had extra volunteers. Moose Valley was operated by Abbie Valine. A big thanks goes out to David Alexander and Miranda Durbin for filling in some days in at the stations when needed. This season we had two banding trainees, Halle Lambeau and Jessy Wilson, which made the banding operation run more smoothly and provided a great opportunity for the trainees to learn all aspects of banding. Due to the pandemic, we unfortunately could not have volunteers.

This season total of 4252 raptors banded was an increase over last year's total 3327, and is above average 3807 raptors banded since 2011. We banded 18 species of raptors, 12 hawks and 6 owls. This total includes 47 previously banded birds. Among the 3329 total raptors, there were 2331 diurnal (hawks) and 1917 nocturnal raptors (owls). Nearly all owls were only banded at the main station at Hawk Ridge this season except for 3 northern Saw-whet and a Long-eared Owl at Paine Farm. The Hawk Ridge station for hawk banding was in operation daily from August 15 to December 9. Moose Valley ran from August 18 to November 25, while Paine Farm

ran from August 28 to November 16. We logged a total of 236 days, which is well above our average of 203 station days since 2011. The average number of raptors banded per day was 18. A total of 2331 hawks were banded during the fall, with monthly total as follows: 140 in August, 1716 in September, 372 in October, 93 in November and 10 in December.

Owl numbers were the second highest with 1917, only behind 2012 when 2034 and is above our average of 1453. We likely saw the peak year for the owl cycle, which last peaked four years ago and correlates with their normal cycle. However, weather again certainly played a role along with breeding success, especially for Northern Saw-whet Owls and we had a record season of 181 Long-eared Owls. Since 2011 we have followed a protocol using two caller units: one each for Northern Saw-whet (NSWO) and Long-eared owl (LEOW). In 2016, we started using a Boreal Owl (BOOW) caller, but starting last season in that location we ran an Eastern Screech Owl (EASO) call for about half the season, then the second half BOOW. We will continue this combination to see if we can detect movement of EASO. 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.

We had the NSOW recoveries (17 foreign and 8 returns), which was down as would be expected from the low numbers captured. However NSWO remain our main source of recoveries. Of the 13 returns banded and recaptured at Hawk Ridge were 2 from 2017, 5 from 2016 and 1 from 2014. The EASO banded in 2017 was recaptured at Hawk Ridge in fall of 2019, which is the first documented record of a return of of this rare owl in St. Louis County. It was recaptured again in 2020!

Some of the noteworthy NSOW foreign recoveries from previous years came from 4 Wisconsin banding sites which includes Linwood Station, Falls Creek, Steven's Point and Cedar Grove. We also had some from North Shore banding sites; French River

and Tofte. We are still waiting on the remainder of the reports from the Bird Banding Lab.

I would also like to thank the numerous volunteers and HRBO staff who helped in many ways, including John Richardson, Nick Pusateri, Maggie Brown and Emma Regnier for communicating sightings to the station. Others who helped in various ways were Grace Glick, Ralph Larsen, and Margie Menzies. Thanks to Janelle Long, our Executive Director who helps with so many ways often not seen by many.

Finally, I would especially like to thank my wife Kate for all she does and for her support.