

Fall Raptor Banding Summary 2021

The 2021 fall raptor banding season at Hawk Ridge is over for another year. In fact, this season marked the 50th year of the banding operation. Before moving on to the season results and discussion, I wanted to express my sadness of the passing of Mary Jane (Molly) Evans. Molly was the first official counter hired at Hawk Ridge back in 1971 and she did the count until the mid-80s. She was the compiler afterwards until I took over both the count and compiler in 1991. She had hired me under the advisement of Bill Clark, who I had worked with for many years. Although not active in the count for some years now, her guidance and love for raptors was evident to all who visited the Ridge. She will be missed by many. RIP Molly.

This fall migration at Hawk Ridge was a strange one for sure. The banding started on August 15 and ended on November 30. We had a great September with over 2,500 raptors banded, then October and November weather took a shift and we saw the 1st two weeks of October with east winds, foggy conditions with most days having some precipitation. The rest of the season was just lackluster and saw few fronts, and when conditions looked promising there was not much of a flight. It was by



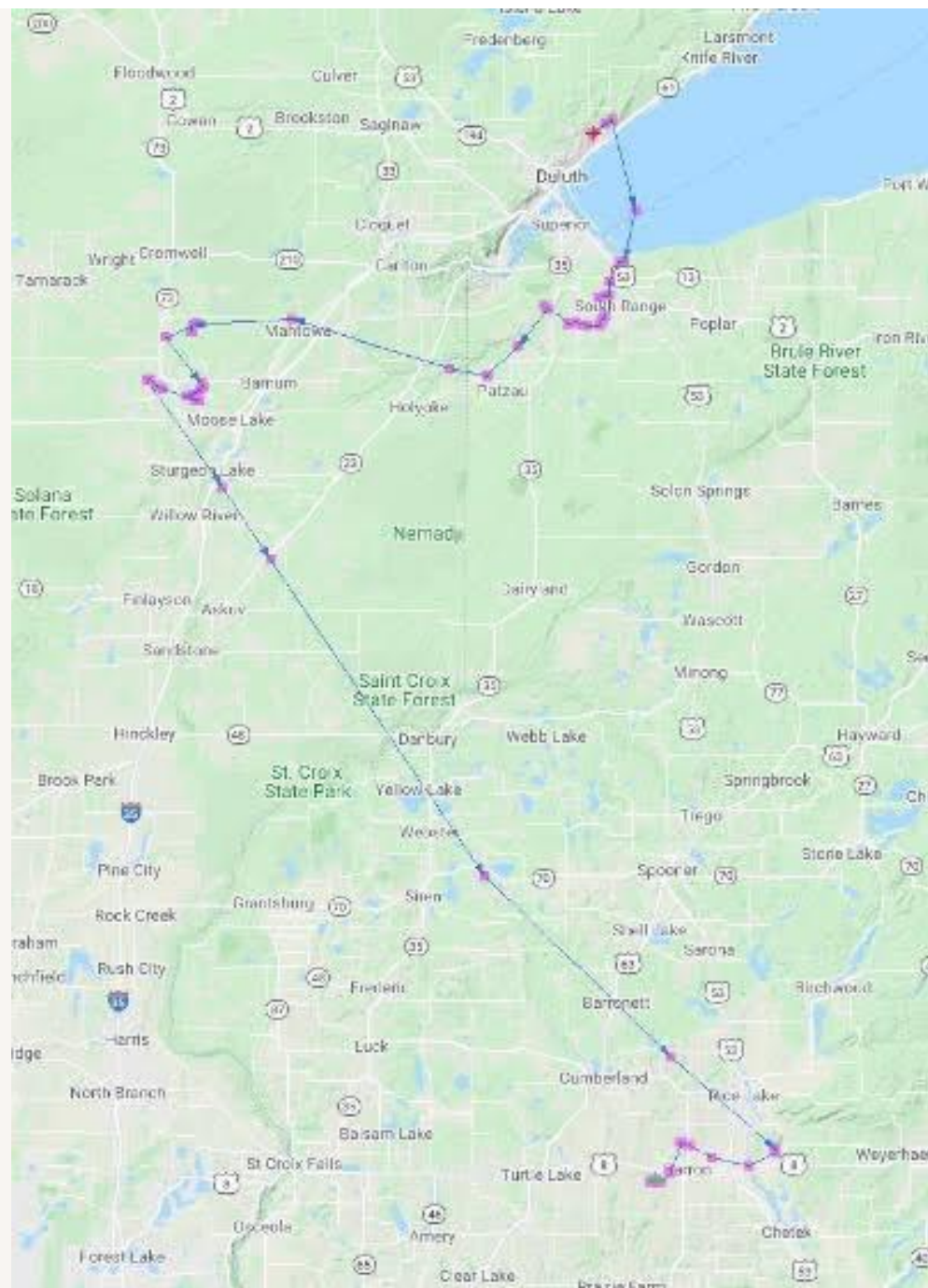
far the worst October and November in my 30 years of being on the Ridge. However, with that said, it was one of my most enjoyable seasons due to the people involved. Some years back I started a banding internship program. This year I enjoyed teaching Emma Regnier, Maggie Brown, and Eliana Heiser all about raptor banding and biology. It was a joy to spend time with these raptor biologists and listening to them talk about their future.

The Golden Eagle captured and banded by Maggie Brown and Emma was certainly the highlight of the season. It was a life changing event for many especially Maggie and Emma. Northern Goshawk saw its worst season in the history of data collecting. Interesting is the fact that last season and this season a fair number of adults were recorded (banded and counted) with almost 50% last fall and 40% this fall. Yet no young goshawks were banded in November?! I suspect and hope that they stayed further north and is not a sign of major decline. Hunters reported high grouse numbers and likely the drought and yet a large production of grasshoppers and other insects kept them north. Ruffed Grouse numbers were supposed to be on the decline with this cycle but it was clear that brood survival rate was high. I also heard about of a fair number of Snowshoe Hare up north.



Rough-legged Hawk numbers banded was a nice surprise (17). Usually after a high number from the previous year when 79 were banded, the following year tends to be lower. There were a fair number of young produced this summer but it was especially nice to catch a few adults. We were lucky to have transmitters to put on two adults provided by Jeff Kidd. See map of our two RLHA. They will likely move further south now that we are getting snow.





Red-tailed hawk is a species we are working on with grad student Allie Pesano. We were able to put on a transmitter on a gorgeous adult dark morph RT. Special thanks to Frank Taylor for catching this individual. We also got last winter's adult dark RT back near where it wintered near the twin cities noted by its transmitter.



Owls numbers were surprisingly low with totals expected to be near average of 1500. Likely weather had an effect on these totals, as we should have had a large number of second-year birds returning. Certainly, a highlight was our returning, for the fourth year, (resident) Screech Owl. Andy Witchger ran the owl banding station for the majority of the season, while others helped with the remaining. Thanks to Hannah Toutonghi, Grace Glick, and Halle Lambeau for assisting.



As with each year, there are so many who help in so many ways with the raptor banding project. Special thanks to David Alexander, Miranda Durbin, Abbie Valine, Emily Pavlovic, Margie Menzies, Matt Etterson, Claire Jones and Samantha Hagler. Also thanks to Janelle Long, education staff, hawk watchers and volunteers who helped in various ways. And of course, Kate Nicoletti who's always supportive of my adventures and passion. Thank you everyone.



Below are the number of raptors banded (*Note these do not include recovers or returns):

Bald Eagle-1
Northern Harrier-26
Sharp-shinned Hawk-1861
Cooper's-19
Northern Goshawk-29
Broad-winged Hawk-13
Red-tailed Hawk-80
Rough-legged Hawk-17
Golden Eagle-1
American Kestrel-77
Merlin-100
Peregrine Falcon-7
Total-2231



Northern Saw-whet Owl-894
Long-eared Owl-46
Barred Owl-9
Great Horned Owl-6
Total Owls-954

Total Raptors-3185

Frank Nicoletti, Banding Director

