

Fall Bird Migration Count Monthly Summary Reports 2020

2020 Fall Bird Migration Count Staff: John Richardson (Fall Count Director), Nick Pusateri, Maggie Brown (Count Trainee), Emma Regnier (Count Trainee)

August 2020 Migration Count Summary

The fall season started August 15th and migration is well underway. 83 species have been recorded with 11 of them been raptors. 34,000 individual birds complete the August count as of writing, with 1,454 being raptors.

Of the raptors, BALD EAGLE (280) and BROAD-WINGED HAWK (743) have by far showed up in respectable numbers. The Broad-winged Hawk total is the highest since 1977.



Nevertheless, the number of NORTHERN HARRIER (39) and RED-TAILED HAWK (60) is not bad for August with the vast majority being immature birds making the maiden voyage south. Next, SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (243) and AMERICAN KESTREL (19) have started up well before the bulk of those that show up in September.

The weather has been mostly warm and very dry with little rain to speak of. We had 4 days of easterly winds with fog 19th-22nd, but then all those birds that were backed up came through in droves. Most notably was Tuesday 25th when Common Nighthawks came through all day and by the end of the day we had over 27,000!

There has been the early movement of RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH and PURPLE FINCH, it remains to be seen if they continue in bigger numbers as the season continues.



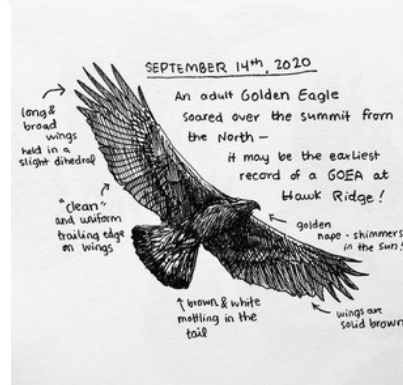
It looks to be another great season at Hawk Ridge already! We welcome back Nick Pusateri, Count Trainee from 2019, now as a Counter! We are excited for the staff that will be joining us. Their wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm about birds is sure to make it a great time for you to come up to the Ridge this fall and enjoy some of the best migration viewing North America has to offer!

Eyes to the skies everybody!
-John Richardson, Fall Count Director

September 2020 Migration Count Summary

When it's good, it's really good!

What a start to September for both raptors and passerines. On 9/16, we had a great day counting season high 1,560 Sharp-shinned Hawks & 6,471 Broad-winged Hawks, as well as 1 Red-shouldered Hawk, 4 Swainson's Hawks and 6,000+ Blue Jays! With yesterday's numbers, we are almost to 45,000 Blue Jays and over 20,000 Broadies already (9,551 Broad-winged Hawks were also counted on 9/13).



A Golden Eagle was counted on Monday, September 14th, which is one of the earliest records of one at Hawk Ridge in the last 15 years. Count Trainee, Emma, shared this beautiful journal sketch of it! We also counted a Mississippi Kite on September 9th, which is an exciting species for us, as it's not one we see each season. Winds for the most part have been very favorable blowing birds from as far as NW Canada. Thursday, September 17th and Friday, September 18th look to be great migration days as well.

We also welcome 2 fantastic new Count Trainees this fall, Emma Regnier & Maggie Brown, who will be learning and counting with us through the end of October!



September is already in the books, hard to believe it flew by so quickly! Perhaps, because we had such a great month. We had a decent fall for Broad-winged Hawks this year with almost 33,000 to date. Sharp-shinned Hawks, American Kestrels, Bald Eagles all moved in decent numbers. Notables for September were 2 Red-shouldered Hawks, 5 Swainson's Hawks and the first Mississippi Kite in several years.



As far as the songbirds go we had a huge year for Blue Jays, surpassing 50,000 and they continue to trickle through. We had big passerine flights during the later part of September During the morning hours. Decent estimates suggest 20-30,000 birds passing over Duluth per sq/km per hour - simply amazing to witness! Winter birds which we hope stick around are starting to show up. Almost 10,000 Pine Siskins have moved through. 10,000 American Robins with more to come no doubt have migrated by.



We are looking forward to October as the Red-tailed Hawks, Goshawks and Golden Eagles come through, we hope you get see a few yourself! You can view our count live [HERE!](#)

Eyes to the skies everybody!

-John Richardson, Fall Count Director

October 2020 Migration Count Summary

October came and went in a flash! When this happens it is usually because you are busy with birds. With little in the way of precipitation (we are down 10 inches of rain this year), there were only 3 days with no counting. The start of the month was more like September with mild, warm temperatures (and an exciting Short-eared Owl sighting on October 2nd!). One day we even logged 81F! Favorable winds allowed



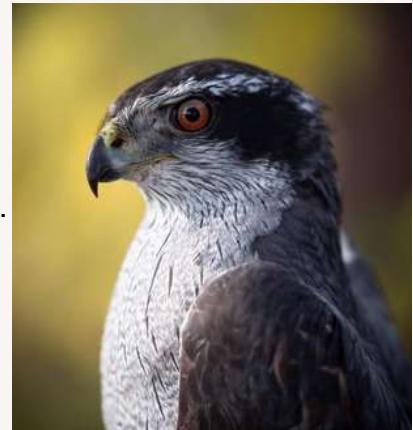
the birds to move not all at once, but more steady with most days seeing good numbers. The end of the month was in stark contrast to the beginning. A record 12 inches of snow and days with wind-chill temps in the single digits made it somewhat sobering and uncomfortable for the count staff, but we pushed through!



The bulk of the TURKEY VULTURES came on the 1st with a daily high record of 854 individuals, pushing the season total up to an impressive 2,320. OSPREY have been in short supply this year with only 1 single bird on the 2nd putting the likely season total at a paltry 144. What is happening to the Osprey population? This represents the lowest season total since 1986. We did not see any big BALD EAGLE days this October, as we often do. It was more of a steady trickle with the biggest day of 164 on the 10th. The

BALD EAGLE population seems to be continually doing well with over 4,200 counted through the end of October and November still to be accounted for. NORTHERN HARRIER numbers appear to be low, with the lowest season total since 2004. With only 287 individuals this fall did we miss them going on a different migration route? Wind direction was generally favorable, so one can only guess.

We had some good SHARP-SHINNED HAWK days with the high coming on the 9th with 885. With the current season standing at 13,572 we are far below the post 22,000 years of 2016-17. Perhaps it was not a successful breeding season for this species? COOPER'S HAWK numbers have continued to decline over the past few years. This species is at the northern limits of its breeding range and only 52 have been counted so far. NORTHERN GOSHAWK, typically a late season migrant, are still at historically low numbers compared to the big numbers of the 90s' and early 2000s'. There were some good days in late October with 18 counted on the 24th.



After a good September count of BROAD-WINGED HAWKS, October saw a few late stragglers. The last individual (a juvenile) came through on the 20th, 18 days since the last three on the 2nd! On the whole, an above average season with 32,919 birds. Where are the RED-TAILED HAWKS one might ask!? Don't ask me I would respond. By October's end only 4,501 have been tallied, which is surprising given the ideal

conditions later in the month. The best day was 849 on the 24th and numbers have continually declined as October past. A late push for November?

One of the highlights for October and the season as a whole has been the incredible numbers of ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS. 2020 has been a rough year all-round, but this is the kind of 'rough' you want if you are going to have one. An all time record (and still with November to go) of 1,462 is just incredible, and if that was not enough the North American one-day total of 525 was smashed to smithereens on the 23rd with 583. A truly memorable day to remember for sure and what made the day on top of all that was the counters talking to Jerry Liguori (the previous record-setter) on the phone with Frank Nicoletti from his home in Utah. What a day!!



SWAINSON'S HAWK

numbers for HRBO were about what we would expect with a couple of late individuals counted in October putting the season total at 7. All 7 dark/intermediate morphs likely from the NW of the continent. GOLDEN EAGLE numbers are steady with a high of 30 on the 23rd. 137 for the month, and 150 season total should (with November) put us about average. The 'golden' highlight was Abbie Valine catching and banding the first GOLDEN EAGLE at HRBO since 2012! Way to go and truly

gorgeous bird.

AMERICAN KESTRELS, and MERLINS trickled through with both species logging in with 73 individuals. AMERICAN KESTREL numbers appear to be continually in decline unfortunately. 2002 saw 3,637 and in contrast we are only at 700 for the season. However, thanks to the count trainees, Maggie & Emma, we did have an American Kestrel and Broad-winged Hawk show up on October 31st! Finally, PEREGRINE FALCON numbers are down also despite their continued decade long recovery. This species can migrate at night and is best seen with southerly winds, which we had very few, so I would not initially read too much into this season's numbers.



After last year's dismal showing of winter finches, we are back to something far more interesting. COMMON REDPOLL (979), PINE SISKIN (11,523), PINE GROSBEEK (541), and both RED CROSSBILL (424) & WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (2,233) have all been present. There is still a whole month of counting left and this amazing season shows no sign of slowing down!

Eyes to the skies everybody!

-John Richardson, Fall Count Director

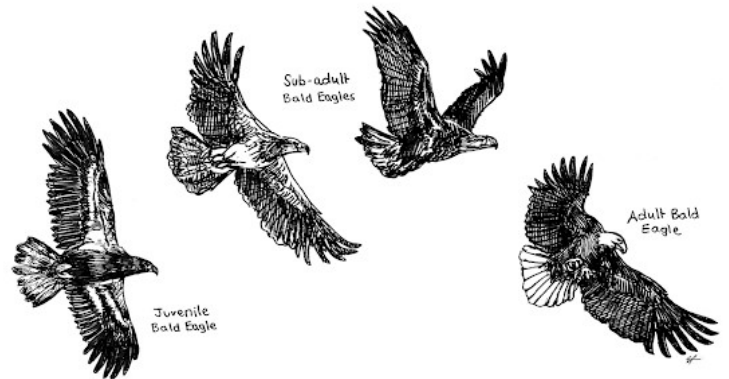


November 2020 Migration Count Summary



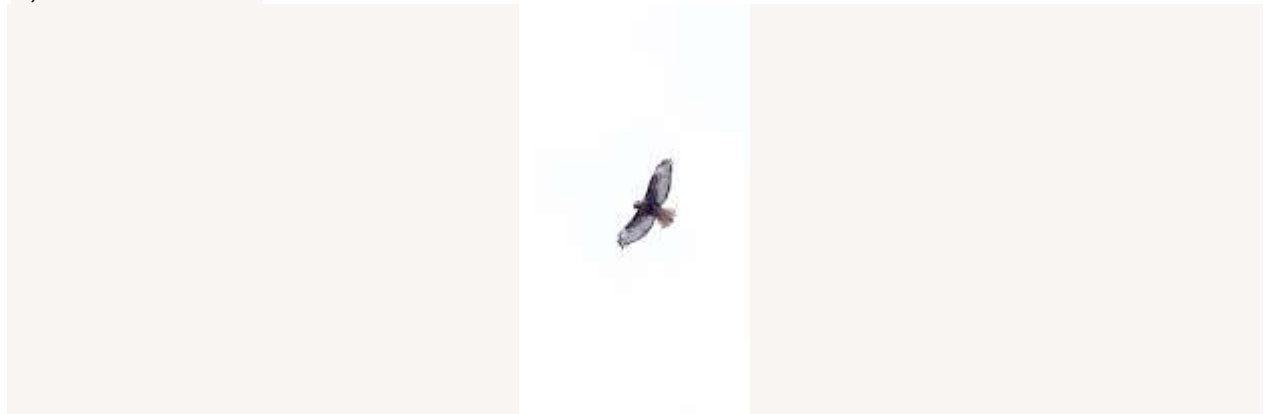
November marked the end of the Fall 2020 migration count, wrapping up a very memorable season here at Hawk Ridge! The month started strong with favorable winds and the flight continued relatively steadily with a few slow stretches towards the end. Unseasonably warm weather during the middle of November made the counters very happy but may have delayed the movement of some of the birds.

We counted a total of 2,152 raptors this month, with 1,039 Bald Eagles making up the majority. They were our most reliable raptor, with at least one or two counted despite adverse weather conditions. Even when no other birds were moving, Bald Eagles forged ahead in gale-force winds, sleet, and snow! The season total for Bald Eagles is 5,300 individuals.



Bald Eagles Sketched by Count Trainee Emma Regnier

The second most numerous species of the month was the Rough-legged Hawk, with 520 individuals counted. Last month's record-setting single day count of 583 Roughies consisted of mostly juvenile birds, so we were anticipating a later push of adults. And, like clockwork, they arrived! The overwhelming majority of the Roughies counted in November were adults - a good mix of dark and light morphs, too. This time last fall, only 79 Roughies were counted in November and the 2019 season total was 158 individuals. This has been an exceptional year for Rough-legged Hawks with our season total for Roughies now at a staggering 1,948 individuals, far surpassing the previous season high at Hawk Ridge of 1,123 from 2017!!



In contrast to the abundance of Roughies this month, we were surprised by the lack of Red-tailed Hawks seen in November. While Red-tails are still one of the most prominent species of the month, we only counted 351 individuals. This monthly total is much lower than the 840 counted in November 2019. Similarly, the 2020 season total of 4,720 Red-tails is significantly lower than the 2019 season total of 6,734. Despite the lower numbers, we still enjoyed the incredible variation in the individuals we observed, including a handful of dark morphs and even one dark adult Harlan's Hawk on November 16th!



November at Hawk Ridge is also well-known for the arrival of Northern Goshawks. On November 1, we counted 40 individuals and achieved our highest daily total for the

season! With 26 more counted on November 2, and a steady stream throughout the rest of the month, our November total reached 141. An impressive proportion of the goshawks counted this month were adults, which is expected for late-fall, but still proved exciting when compared to the numbers of juveniles observed in the previous months. The season total of Northern Goshawks is 268.



The next most numerous raptors were Golden Eagles, with 70 birds counted in November. We had a few days of double-digit Goldens, but for the most part they trickled through in twos and threes. Nonetheless, it was always refreshing to spot a distant Golden circling with a group of Bald Eagles. Even though the number of Goldens this month seems down from last November, we still finished with a season total of 208 individuals (comparable to last year's season total of 203). Guess the Goldens just got an earlier start to migration this year?



Not to be forgotten, there were a few other raptor species that helped to occasionally spice up the species diversity for the count. Some 21 late-season Sharp-shinned Hawks zipped through during November, as well as 5 Northern Harriers. On November 17th, one fashionably late adult Broad-winged Hawk circled the count platform, flanked by a pair of Rough-legged Hawks! No one expected to see a Broad-wing in mid-November, but that's one of the beauties of hawkwatching - you never really know what each day might bring! We even counted one surprise Merlin on the final day of the 2020 season.



The raptors were not the only migrants of interest this month, as the late-season passerines continued to move through in steady numbers! Common Redpoll, Pine Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, and Red Crossbill all made November appearances, and always brightened up the count with their charismatic vocalizations. It has been an exceptional year for winter finches, especially when compared to their notable absence last season. You can also look back at daily sightings of all species from this fall on the [HRBO eBird account](#) or via [Dunkadoo](#) and [HawkCount](#).

And that is a wrap on the Fall 2020 migration! Thank you to everyone who joined us up on the ridge and helped make this season a success. We look forward to more migration in Spring 2021.

-Maggie Brown & Emma Regnier, Hawk Ridge Fall Count Trainees/November Counters