

West Skyline Spring Count Report 2022

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory conducted the West Skyline Hawk Count (WSHC) from March 1 - May 31 2022. This is the fifth year of a planned consecutive 10-year count, made possible by a very generous donation. This project documents migrants in the Western Great Lakes, in Duluth, Minnesota.

Observations were conducted from two sites, Enger Tower on N/W/S winds, and Thompson Hill on NE or E winds. A total of 19,089 raptors were tallied. Respectively, March totaled 3,272 raptors, April 5,410 and May 10,407. 16 total raptors were observed. Of the 92 days of the count, poor weather canceled or shortened the count period to less than 4 hours on 21 days. Total observation hours were 517.5. In addition to raptors, 117 other species of birds were recorded as migrants on Dunkadoo. Live updates can be seen all season long on the Dunkadoo website, as well as the Hawkcount website. Additional summaries and totals are submitted to eBird.

WSHC 5-year average stands at 23,993, putting 2022 below average, but similar to the previous 2 years. This decrease in count totals is likely related to unfavorable weather patterns. April consisted of 24 count days, and half with NE winds, usually unfavorable at WSHC. Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Broad-winged, Red-tailed, and Merlin were slightly below the 5-year average, between 8-25% decrease. Two species, Sharp-shinned Hawks and Rough-legged Hawks were down 45% and 64% respectively. Northern Harrier count was the highest since 2004, and the highest of the 5-year period.

While seasonal counts were not outstanding, there were several high daily counts and unique raptors. On March 17, WSHC set the new daily record for Bald Eagles, 1,206. Some of the rarer raptors in Duluth included one dark morph Broad-winged hawk, three Red-shouldered hawks, and 5 Swainson's hawks. There were modest flights of warblers beginning in mid-April and only growing in numbers through May. One Connecticut warbler even sang briefly at Enger Tower. Fair numbers of Common Redpolls were seen heading north throughout the first two months, alongside fewer numbers of Bohemian waxwing. Other species of interest seen at WSHC include Short-eared Owl, Snowy Owl, White-winged crossbills and Snow goose.

Spring education programs were able to expand this year with Education Director, Margie Menzies, and new Spring Naturalist/Count Interpreter Sara DePew. HRBO offered numerous school programs and also hosted the annual Spring Migration workshop, which was a great success. Approx. 35 programs were conducted with nearly 1,000 participants. Hawk Ridge partnered with the Hawk Migration Association of North America on the "Owls to Eagles" winter tour, where they visited the WSHC as part of the trip for an afternoon of hawk watching. A huge thank you to all who visited this season, and we hope to see you next year to help further our understanding of spring migration on Lake Superior.

Acknowledgements:

I am incredibly grateful to all who helped spot this season, we couldn't do it without you. Also, a thank you to Sara DePew for fielding many questions at the watch and making sure every dog was greeted appropriately.

A huge thanks is due to Frank Nicoletti, Count Director, for being an incredible mentor, counter, and helping me to succeed this season.

A special thanks to Daniel Erickson, Ralph Larsen, John Edwards, Ed Longhway, Hannah Toutonghi, and Steve Kolbe.

Thanks for your good spotting.

Sean McLaughlin, Spring Counter