

Braddock Bay Hawkwatch Report – Spring 2009

By David Tetlow

Summary Introduction

Spring of 2009 at the Braddock Bay hawkwatch could be described as miserable, poor, nightmarish, and guano-esque. But why be redundant, we'll just call it somewhat frustrating. The weather once again just did not want to cooperate. Winds seemed to always be out of the north or east, but light in force with quite often blue skies. These conditions allow too many birds to go around us so that on "good" weather days (southwest winds) there is not the flight you would expect. Despite the conditions, this is Braddock Bay, and as usual it had its highlights and special moments. The total number of raptors counted for the season was 56,707.

March

The hawkwatch opened up the season with a total of 5 raptors counted on the 1st, so we were off to a good start. Sometimes it takes an entire week to see the first migrant. There was coverage on 20 out of 31 days, an indication that the weather was fair even if not favorable. A total of 4,307 birds were counted, quite a bit below average for March. A Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) on the 31st was a highlight, but 2,870 Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) for the month was rather poor. We often count that many in a single day. Josh Lawrey (counter and assistant for the 2003 & 2004 seasons) was due to come to Braddock Bay on April 1st to help out for little over a month, so optimism was still high for the season.

April

A total of 1,460 birds were counted on the 1st, so we were off to a decent count for the month. There was coverage on 24 out of 30 days, again an indication that the weather was fair even if not favorable. Josh proved to be the good luck charm, as 4,507 birds were counted on the 2nd, the first day of his arrival. A total of 50,381 birds were counted in April, not too shabby by recent years' standards. The two best days were the 25th and 27th, with a total of 12,527 and 9,487 respectively. The 27th was also livened-up by an immature light morph Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) seen at point-blank range by several people. A dark-morph Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypteron*), rarely seen in our region, rounded out April's highlights.

May

A total of 489 birds were counted on the 1st. Would this set the tone for the month? Unfortunately not. May 2009 was one of the most frustrating months weather-wise that Braddock Bay has ever seen. Only 8 days had any significant coverage, a testament to the unfavorable conditions. The weather was not actually bad, it would be better described as benign. Almost every day was clear with light north-northeast or east-northeast winds. Birds definitely move on those conditions, but they are high, scattered, and move along a broad front almost impossible to detect. A dismal 2,019 birds were counted for May - ten times this total is expected. But as usual, highlights were had. Three Swainson's Hawks were counted, including the first ever captured and banded bird. This bird was caught by Dan Niven and sent over to the hawkwatch to be enjoyed by the many people that were attending the International Migratory Bird Day festivities. The immature dark morph bird was

photographed and seen up-close and personal by many before being released on site.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to all who provided any form of help or companionship. Josh Lawrey covered most of April and Mike Tetlow and Kenny Frisch covered a few hours and/or days. As always, Braddock Bay even in a frustrating year is a great place to be and it is very special to be a part of the spectacle. For those interested, go on-line to Cornell University's E-bird web site at www.ebird.org to view all species counted for the season at Braddock Bay. The raptor totals broken out by day and month can be viewed at www.bbrr.org.

Thanks again, all. ~ Dave