

Introduction

In addition to being one of the best spring raptor migration sites on the continent, Braddock Bay is also home to a unique concentration of raptors in late summer. This is the result of the natal dispersal of several species, but primarily Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*). Natal dispersal is defined as a permanent movement away from an animal's birth site, or in the case of birds, their nesting site. In late summer, young raptors are chased away from the nesting territory by their parents. During this time, and prior to fall migration for some species, hawks and other raptors are wandering about the landscape, finding their way in the world to a new territory. In our area, just like in the spring, southerly winds can bring many of those raptors to Braddock Bay, following the Lake Ontario shore in the same manner.



One of the 2,659 Red-tailed Hawks tallied during the 2020 Summer Raptor Count. Photo by Jill Frier

Late summer natal dispersal flights have been documented for decades at Braddock Bay, but not in as consistent a manner as the spring migration flights. There has been some effort by individual members of BBRR to conduct counts at the hawkwatch over the years as well, but the effort has been inconsistent in both the timing and duration that the counts have been conducted. Still, BBRR archives show that as many as 7,330 raptors have been tallied in a single summer season (2002), and as many as 2,725 in a single day (8/17/09). The majority of those counted have been juvenile Red-tailed Hawks.

2019 was the first year an official count was implemented, using protocol similar to the spring migration count. The primary goal of the Summer Raptor Count is to document the magnitude of the natal dispersal of Red-tailed Hawks through the Braddock Bay area by following a consistent data collection protocol. A secondary goal is to document the occurrence of other raptor species during this time frame as well.

Results

The 2020 Summer Raptor Count was conducted for 32 days, for a total of 118.17 hours. The average daily coverage was 3.6 hours. There were six days where volunteers put in over 5 hours of time counting. Even though the protocol is to begin the count on August 1, conditions were favorable for migration on July 27, and a count was conducted on that day as well. There was only one day in which zero birds were counted, but not due to lack of volunteer effort.

A total of 12 species were observed throughout the duration of the count, for a grand tally of 3,271 individual raptors. Daily reports can be found on <http://hawkcount.org/>. The top four species included Red-tailed Hawk (2,659), Turkey Vulture (265), Broad-winged Hawk (157), and Bald Eagle (152). Red-tailed Hawks made up 81% of the overall count. Other species observed included Osprey (11), Northern Harrier (4), Cooper's Hawk (7), Sharp-shinned Hawk (5), Red-shouldered Hawk (1), American Kestrel (5), Merlin (3) and Peregrine Falcon (2) collectively made up 1.2% of the count total.

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(2019 Summer Raptor Count—Continued from page 1)

The highest single day count occurred on August 11, with a total of 667 raptors. A total of 6 observer hours were put in by counters Chris Smith and Dave Robertson. The number of Red-tailed Hawks counted that day was 613. A count of 32 Bald Eagles would be the highest for this season on this day as well. A beautiful summer day of consistent southwest winds and temperatures in low 80's F brought lots of birds!

Chris Smith reported the following in the observation notes of the day:

The flight was most often very high with a few scattered lower migrants. The heavy cloud cover allowed the birds to appear to "drop out of the sky". The flight path was not consistent, which made head swiveling not an option but mandatory in order to count them all. It was an exciting day.

Not only was August 11 a good day for the count, it was a good day for our banding team as well. On that same day, bander David Mathiason, assisted by trainee Gabe Moore, banded 28 Red-tailed Hawks. A total of 142 raptors were banded in just 16 days during the month of August. As is typical in August, Red-tailed Hawks made up the bulk of the captures at 134.

Acknowledgements

Without our volunteer counters, this count would not be possible. Even in pandemic times, we were able to get a crew of counters together and even welcome some new recruits. Thank you to the crew: Linda & Dennis Bender, Hannah Brenner, Carol Erb, Jill Frier, Earl Harrington, Ben Nelson, Dave Robertson, Ed Sailer, Chris Smith, Gerri Sweet, Mike Tetlow, and Bridget Watts. An extra acknowledgement of thanks goes to Mike Tetlow for helping run onsite orientation and training at the beginning of the count.



Bald Eagles are one of the top 4 species for the summer raptor count. Photo by Jill Frier

Summer Raptor Count Totals by Year		
	2020	2019
Turkey Vulture	265	361
Osprey	11	13
Bald Eagle	152	171
Northern Harrier	4	7
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5	3
Cooper's Hawk	7	12
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	3
Broad-winged Hawk	157	307
Red-tailed Hawk	2659	1809
American Kestrel	5	2
Merlin	3	1
Peregrine Falcon	2	5
Total Raptors	3271	2697
<i>Total Count Hours</i>	<i>118.17</i>	<i>116.08</i>