

### 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.



*Red-tailed Hawk. Photo by Ed Sailer*

Late summer natal dispersal flights have been documented for decades at Braddock Bay, but not in as consistent of a manner as the spring migration flights. BBRR has mainly focused research efforts on this phenomenon through banding studies. Since 1984, in late summer (primarily August), banders at Braddock Bay have banded over 10,000 Red-tailed Hawks! 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.

Plans for a more official summer count began in the fall of 2018, and were implemented for the first time in the summer of 2019. A team of volunteer counters was lead by Daena Ford and Mike Tetlow. The primary goal of this 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. This report will share the methodology and results of the count.

### Methodology

The Summer Raptor Count follows a methodology similar to that of the Spring Migration Raptor Count at Braddock Bay conducted by BBRR. In order to bring as much consistency to the count as possible, the following guidelines were set, and will be followed year to year:

- a. Daily coverage is from August 1 through August 31, with the exception of inclement weather.
- b. Coverage shall take place daily for a minimum of 2 hours per day, regardless of wind direction.
- c. Official observers (counters) shall consist of 1 or 2 volunteers. Other volunteers may assist with the watch in scribing, taking additional age and sex data when appropriate, and/or covering part of the flight (when experience level is appropriate).
- d. The number of watch sites shall be limited to one, which will be at Braddock Bay Park
- e. Weather data, as well as flight characteristics, are taken hourly in accordance with the standards set forth by the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA).
- f. All raptors determined to be migrating shall be recorded throughout each hour for the duration of the day's count.
- g. When possible, age of raptors shall be noted (primarily a determination between adult and immature)

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## Results

The 2019 Summer Raptor Count was conducted for 33 days, for a total of 116.8 hours. The average daily coverage was 3.5 hours. Even though the protocol is to begin the count on August 1, conditions were favorable for migration on July 28 & 29, so counts were conducted on both of those days as well. There were only two days in which zero birds were counted, one day due to rain and the other due to east winds.

A total of 12 species were observed throughout the duration of the count, for a grand tally of 2,697 individual raptors. (See table on page 4 for daily totals) The top four species included Red-tailed Hawk (1,809), Turkey Vulture (361), Broad-winged Hawk (307), and Bald Eagle (171). Red-tailed Hawks made up 67% of the overall count. A handful of Osprey, Cooper's hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks and Red-shouldered Hawks collectively made up 1.4% of the count total. All three local falcon species were observed as well, which included 2 American Kestrels and 1 Merlin. Peregrine falcon was the most numerous of the three species at 5 individuals. One of those peregrines was observed harassing a Broad-wing, Red-tail and Bald Eagle within the same kettle!

The highest daily count came early in the month on August 8, with a total of 535 raptors. It was a very dramatic weather day, which caused some great bursts of raptors before and after a storm front. It also happened to be the one day when our spring counter David Brown decided to pay a visit from Pennsylvania. He sure picked a good day! The following observations are quoted from the day's report by Mike Tetlow, which is testament to how exciting migration can be at Braddock Bay.

*The first three hours of the count featured SW winds, gradually thickening clouds, and a steady flight of Red-tailed and Broad-winged Hawks ahead of a storm front, which reached Braddock at 11:15 EST, bringing lightning and torrential rain that shut down the count for 45 minutes. Hawks started flying again after the rain, many of them appearing far away to our northwest, only scope visible, before flying southeast. Around 2:00 pm EST, an approaching front brought closer hawks and a burst of Bald Eagles before rain ended the count.*

The second highest day was on August 18, with an official total of 475 raptors, of which 454 came through in just one hour between 10:00-11:00 am EST. This push of birds also came ahead of a passing storm front. Unfortunately, volunteer counters for the day were unable to continue the count after the rain passed. However, raptor banders Jill Heimrich and Tim Willis were banding at our Payne Beach station (about 2 miles northwest of the hawkwatch) that day and were also keeping tally of birds passing by. They witnessed another push of hawks from 12:00-2:00 pm, which included 161 red-tails. This would have put the total number of Red-tailed Hawks alone that day up to at least 615, meaning that the day's total would have surpassed that of August 8. The Payne Beach banding crew banded 21 Red-tailed Hawks that day. The total number of raptors banded for August was 39 Red-tailed Hawks and 1 Red-shouldered Hawk.

## Other Observations

Even on days with few migrating raptors, there were often "local" or non-migrant raptors there to entertain the counters. Most commonly seen were Bald Eagles, Osprey and Red-tailed Hawks. Other species that showed up from time to time were Northern Harriers and Cooper's Hawks. A few non-migrant falcons also showed up, including a Merlin that plowed through a flock of goldfinches, and Peregrine that was seen diving on two Sandhill Cranes passing by.

Braddock Bay is home to more than raptors of course. Some of the sightings of other bird species listed by our counters included: American and Least Bittern, Sora, Green Heron, Blue-winged Teal (with a flock of Mallards), Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plover, Marbled Godwit, Great Egret, Purple Martin, and Tree and Barn swallows.

## Acknowledgements

Planning for the Summer Raptor Count started in the fall of 2018. Much appreciation goes out to the committee members Mike Tetlow, Greg Lawrence, David Marsh, Nick Pusateri, Ed Sailer, and Bridget Watts who provided insight and support for putting this effort together and getting it up and running for 2019.

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Many thanks to The Bird House in Pittsford for providing a classroom for our training class, and Mike Tetlow for running on onsite orientation at the beginning of the count.

Without our volunteer counters, this count would not be possible. Thank you to the crew: Linda and Dennis Bender, Carol Erb, Liz Delconte, Daena Ford, Jill Frier, Earl Harrington, Dan Niven, Nick Pusateri, Dave Robertson, Ed Sailer, Jim Saller, Carol Shay, Mike Tetlow and Bridget Watts. Also, thanks to our guest counters David Brown and Greg Lawrence who were able to lend a hand a bit. Looking forward to the next count in 2020.

### 2019 Summer Raptor Count Daily Totals

Species Key: TV – Turkey Vulture, OS – Osprey, BE – Bald Eagle, NH – Northern Harrier, SS – Sharp-shinned Hawk, CH – Cooper's Hawk, RS – Red-shouldered Hawk, BW – Broad-winged Hawk, RT – Red-tailed Hawk, AK – American Kestrel, ML – Merlin, PG – Peregrine Falcon, UB – unidentified buteo species

Date	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	RS	BW	RT	AK	ML	PG	UB	TOTAL
28-Jul	21	0	29	0	0	0	0	1	94	1	0	0	0	146
29-Jul	7	0	11	0	0	0	0	2	53	0	0	0	0	73
1-Aug	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	9
2-Aug	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	7
3-Aug	13	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	27
4-Aug	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
5-Aug	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	3	12
6-Aug	30	0	11	1	0	0	0	10	144	0	0	0	0	196
7-Aug	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	12
8-Aug	29	2	19	0	0	1	0	70	414	0	0	0	0	535
9-Aug	26	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	29	0	0	0	0	60
10-Aug	6	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	12
11-Aug	15	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	43
12-Aug	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	43	0	0	0	0	47
13-Aug	19	0	1	0	1	2	0	8	100	0	0	0	0	131
14-Aug	37	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	63
15-Aug	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	6
16-Aug	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	8
17-Aug	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
18-Aug	0	5	37	0	1	3	2	99	328	0	0	0	0	475
19-Aug	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	93	0	0	0	0	101
20-Aug	23	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	45
21-Aug	14	2	12	0	0	1	1	91	191	0	0	2	0	314
22-Aug	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	31
23-Aug	9	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	12
24-Aug	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5
25-Aug	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
26-Aug	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
27-Aug	23	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	28
28-Aug	30	0	11	2	1	1	0	19	131	0	0	3	0	198
29-Aug	7	0	9	1	0	0	0	0	27	0	0	0	0	44
30-Aug	3	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	26	0	0	0	0	34
31-Aug	8	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	8	0	1	0	0	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>1809</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2697</b>