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BBRR's Mission:

- To educate the public about, to conduct research programs on, and to contribute to consideration of public policy on birds of prey, other wildlife and the environment.
- To maintain the natural character of Braddock Bay, Lake Ontario, New York for public benefit.

2025 Hawkwatch Season—by Maili Waters, Official Counter

The 2025 spring migration season officially commenced on March 1st and ended on May 31st. There were also two days in February and three days in June that volunteers conducted the count, which added over 2,000 birds to the season total. This season represents the 48th year that a raptor count has been conducted at Braddock Bay, and the 39th season that Braddock Bay Raptor Research has been the organizer of the count. A total of 74,205 raptors were counted during 614 hours over 97 days. This is the 7th highest season total in the history of the count.



Female American Kestrel. Photo by Maili Waters

February

The very first day of the season was on February 22 when Mike Tetlow, Daena Ford, and I spent a few hours at the park. We could not get to the platform as there was over a foot of snow on the ground, so we observed from the parking lot. With SW winds and temps above freezing for a change, we saw a total of 6 Bald Eagles, the first of many more to come.

March

The first day of the official count was cold and windy with temps in the low 20s and strong northwest winds nearly blowing us over. Cloudy skies with scattered snow showers kept the sun from peeking through. This kind of subpar weather seemed to be a recurring theme throughout the season—but that's probably an inevitable reality anywhere on the shore of Lake Ontario in spring! The first migrating hawk of the official count was a beautiful dark morph Rough-legged Hawk, the first of 52 Rough-legs to pass by the platform this spring.

The month of March was characterized by anticipation. When is the weather going to change? When are we going to see our first Golden Eagle? Gradually, the raptors started flowing, with bigger pulses coming through towards the end of the month.

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Braddock Bay Hawkwatch Monthly Totals by Species—Spring 2025

Species	February	March	April	May	June	TOTAL	Season Average *
Turkey Vulture	0	9,577	15,315	4,298	365	29,555	13,642
Osprey	0	2	63	150	7	222	221
Bald Eagle	6	153	363	698	124	1,344	360
Northern Harrier	0	133	386	264	6	790	796
Sharp-shinned Hawk	0	198	3,444	1,407	0	5,049	5,478
Cooper's Hawk	0	101	100	28	2	231	489
American Goshawk	0	0	2	0	0	2	34
Red-shouldered Hawk	0	339	25	2	0	366	678
Broad-winged Hawk	0	0	23,286	9,433	1,927	34,646	28,263
Red-tailed Hawk	0	265	637	478	18	1,398	3,727
Rough-legged Hawk	0	26	22	4	0	52	302
Golden Eagle	0	4	19	8	0	31	26
American Kestrel	0	59	356	24	2	441	548
Merlin	0	6	19	11	0	36	27
Peregrine Falcon	0	7	15	12	0	34	17
Mississippi Kite	0	0	0	1	3	4	1
Short-eared Owl	0	0	4	0	0	4	0
TOTAL	6	10,870	44,056	16,818	2,455	74,205	55,129

*Season averages are from 1977-2025.

(2025 Hawkwatch Season—Continued from page 1)

A total of 10,870 raptors flew over Braddock Bay in March, with the highest single day total of the month on the 31st with 4,010 birds.

As expected, the most abundant species of the month was Turkey Vulture with a total of 9,577. The vast majority of the season's Red-shouldered Hawks were counted this month, with 339 out of 366. Amazingly, more than half of these moved through on a single day: we saw 180 Red-shoulders on March 18th! This March total is relatively high compared to the rest of the season; they are usually more evenly split between March and April. It was our highest March total in the past 11 years, even though the season total was only slightly over the 10-year average. This indicates their migration was slightly earlier in the season compared to 'normal'.

There were significantly lower numbers of Red-tailed Hawks compared with past March totals. Only 265 Red-tails were counted which represents the lowest March Red-tailed Hawk total in the history of the count. In slightly better news, we had relatively good March totals of American Kestrel (52) and Northern Harrier (133).

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In addition to raptors, there were plenty of waterfowl and passerines around in March to keep us occupied. Migration progressed throughout the month, with new arrivals like Tree Swallow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Fox Sparrow adding some spice to our days. A drake Eurasian Wigeon was a welcome addition to the duck flocks in the bay. March 19th was particularly fun, with thousands of robins and blackbirds flying over including almost 300 Rusty Blackbirds! Big waterfowl numbers included almost 10,000 Snow Geese, just over 3,000 Tundra Swans, and around 1,000 Northern Pintail.



Dark morph Rough-legged Hawk spotted on March 15, 2025. Photo by Maili Waters

April

As the calendar switched over to April, it felt like the floodgates were really about to open. The second half of the month is typically peak season here at Braddock, and this year was no exception. A total of 44,056 raptors were seen this month, with the highest day total on April 18 with 10,369 birds. As expected, the bulk of the numbers in April were made up of Broad-winged Hawks, with lots of Turkey Vultures as well.

Bald Eagle numbers continue to increase from past years: we saw 363 this month, which is the second-highest April total for the count. Northern Harriers were numerous with 386 counted this month; this is higher than the last five April totals. Sharp-shinned Hawks were surprisingly numerous this month with a total of 3,444, the highest April total in over a decade. This is encouraging to see, as Sharp-shinned Hawks are ranked as the most declined species out of the 27 species of migratory raptors across North America (Smith, 2023). Our hunch that there was an earlier shift in Red-shouldered Hawks was backed up by a very weak total this month: we only saw 25, the lowest April Red-shouldered Hawk count ever at Braddock. We saw two American Goshawks on back-to-back days, one at Frisbee Hill and one at the Braddock Bay Park. It was exciting to see these two birds, however it was a stark reminder of how much this species has declined in recent years. One count record was broken this season and it all happened in April: four Short-eared Owls were seen, breaking the previous high count of three.

One of the most-anticipated parts of the season at Braddock Bay is the spectacular Broad-winged Hawk migration. As soon as April hit, we started speculating when we'd see our first Broad-wing...most of us were overly optimistic by a few days, but finally the first handful flew over on April 14. This perhaps a touch later than the average arrival, probably just due to local weather conditions. Due to the subpar weather, birds were getting backed up for several days before they were able to move—but this created the two highlight days of the season! Between April 18 and 19 we counted just over 19,000 birds! Beside the breathtaking numbers of Broad-winged Hawks (over 16,000 on these two days), there were also many other species moving in large numbers. 10 Golden Eagles flew by in one day, along with 64 American Kestrels, 663 Sharp-shinned Hawks, and 1 Rough-legged Hawk.

Another great setup happened on April 29th, with warm SW winds producing a large Sharp-shinned Hawk flight. Starting at dawn, they were on the move all day with hundreds coming right over the platform, almost within touching distance. We ended that day with 1,148 Sharpies. In addition, we saw two Golden Eagles and an American Goshawk fly over, providing some extra excitement on the platform.

There were also plenty of non-raptors migrating through in April. Robins and blackbirds continued to stream by early in the month, with increasing numbers of Northern Flickers. By mid-April it seemed like new arrivals were

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(2025 Hawkwatch Season—Continued from page 3)

popping up almost every day, and there were often Yellow-rumped and Western Palm Warblers around the platform to keep us company. Sandhill Cranes were almost a daily occurrence, with small groups flying around and even sometimes landing on the lawn! By the end of the month, Blue Jays started to move by the hundreds, and we started to see some familiar spring migrants like warblers and orioles showing up. The rarity highlight was a spiffy Lark Sparrow that made a brief appearance at our birdseed pile on April 26.

May

The theme of poor weather continued into May, with cold and wet conditions dominating the month. We recorded fewer than 20 birds on 12 out of the 31 days this month. However, with lows there are also highs and we had some amazing days in May! On five days this month we saw over a thousand birds, including 2,898 on May 16. Our total for the month was 16,818 birds, and the most abundant species was Broad-winged Hawk.

The switch from adult Broad-winged Hawks to immature birds occurs in the first half of May, which is always interesting to observe. In general, adult birds need to get to the breeding grounds quickly, so they migrate earlier in the season than the immature birds. The flight on May 2, with 760 Broad-wings, was still mostly adults. On the May 16, we recorded 1,600 Broad-wings and most of these were immature birds. By the very end of the month, it was hard to pick out a single adult among the masses of young ones. This always feels like an indication that the majority of the spring raptors have already passed by, even though we still had some great days in the last week of the month.

Bald Eagles are also a theme in May, with around half of the season's total coming from this month. Our highest day count of Bald Eagle for the season happened on May 7, with 118 counted. We saw 125 Red-tailed Hawks on May 2, our highest single-day count for the month of May. Our total of 150 Ospreys was the highest May count in the past six years, and 264 Northern Harriers was the highest May total in the past 25 years. Sharp-shinned Hawks continued to show in strong numbers, with a total of 1,407—the highest May total in the past eight years.

Of course, May is also a wonderful month for the numbers and diversity of other Neotropical migrants. Warblers really kicked into high gear, with impressive numbers of Bay-breasted, Tennessee, and Blackpoll Warblers around the parking lot and platform. Blue Jays continued to move by the hundreds, one day having over 6,000. On the May 24 we were able to pick a Franklin's Gull out from the groups of gulls off the west spit. The very next day two American White Pelicans flew over, providing excellent views.

June

There were 19.75 hours of hawkwatching in June thanks to dedicated volunteers. This time added 2,455 birds to the season total, including 3 of the 4 Mississippi Kites. Young Broad-winged Hawks were the most numerous species this month with a total of 1,927 individuals.

Summary

Overall, it was an amazing season! With a total of 74,205 birds, this season is in the top 7 years of the 48-year count. We saw a total of 17 species of raptor over 614.5 hours observing. It was encouraging to see some increase



Broad-winged Hawk. Photo by Maili Waters

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in numbers in certain species. For example, American Kestrels and Northern Harriers, both on the decline, had better totals than the past several years. Also, Sharp-shinned Hawks had the highest total in the past 13 years. All other species had pretty average totals, with no major outliers. A few regular rarities like Black Vulture and Swainson's Hawk escaped our detection.

This season started and ended in winter coats. The weather wasn't always cooperative but we made the best of it. There were lots of laughs, stories, and jokes shared on the platform this season. Fresh coffee was made, clickers were broken, and lots of dogs were patted. In addition to raptors, there were many other birds seen this season. From thousands of Snow Geese and hundreds of Tundra Swans, to the massive movements of robins and blackbirds, to thousands of sky-high Blue Jays shimmering in the distance, there was always something to watch. Several fun rarities kept us on our toes, with highlights including Lark Sparrow, Franklin's Gull, Mississippi Kite, and American White Pelicans. A total of 193 species of bird were seen or heard from the platform this season.



Sharp-shinned Hawk. Photo by Maili Waters

Acknowledgments

I want to thank everyone who followed the season's reports, came to the hawkwatch, and supported Braddock Bay Raptor Research this year. This spring migration count would not be possible without the support of the incredible community around Rochester. I truly appreciate everyone who helped out this season. I want to give a special shout out to Mike Tetlow for teaching me so much this season, Daena Ford for this amazing opportunity, and Jessie Barry for her support and guidance. I also want to



Some of the hearty hawkwatchers that came out on a chilly last day of the spring count. Photo by Daena Ford

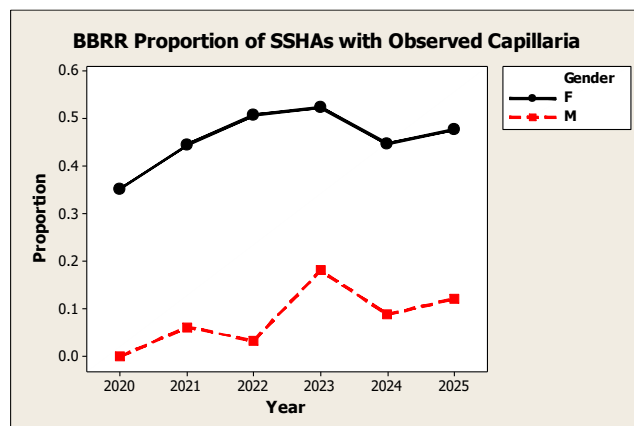
thank everyone who helped count on the busy days and provided support and entertainment on the slow days, including Bridget Watts, Greg Sanda, and Vid Killius. And to everyone else who brought me good company and delicious snacks, I wish I could list all of you by name; I am so grateful for your support!

Resources:

Smith, R. (2023, February 3). *Species conservation: Sharp-shinned hawk (Accipiter striatus)*. Raptor Population Index. <https://www.rpi-project.org/species-conservation-sharp-shinned-hawk-accipiter-striatus/>

Note from the Banding Director—by David Mathiason

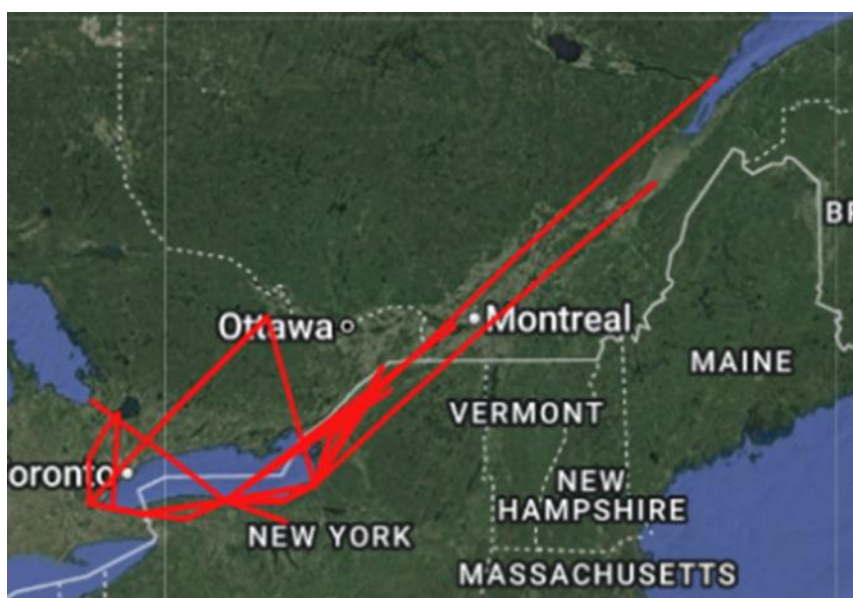
Data from our observations of capillaria in Sharp-shinned Hawks this past spring is now available. The graph at right shows the proportion of birds for which the capillaria infection could be visually detected. It does seem that the rate of infection is no longer increasing though it is hard to say if it is holding steady or perhaps decreasing. It still is true that this infection is seen far more often in females than males, something for which we have no explanation. Next spring, Dr. Sara Childs-Sanford (from Cornell University) will be working with us on a toxicology study to test the birds for environmental contaminants.



Motus transmitters were attached to 24 female Sharp-shinned Hawks in 2024. The detections from those hawks, as they returned south in the fall, provided some evidence that this infection is associated with a lower survival rate. This past spring, we attached another 23 Motus tags. The study protocol that we are now completing requires that another round of transmitters be attached in 2026. The Genesee Valley Audubon Society has offered funding for that endeavor and we are deeply appreciative of that grant.

The map at right shows the detections that we have received so far from the tags attached this past spring (the last one being May 13). We can see that two of the hawks were detected heading northeast along the St. Lawrence River, three near Barrie, Ontario, and that two west of Ottawa. And, as happened last year, some of the hawks took a westward route around Lake Ontario. As hawks venture further north there is no further tracking of them, due to the scarcity of Motus towers in that region. We are now waiting to see how many of them return during their fall migration.

Map of Spring 2025 Detections from MOTUS Tags on Sharp-shinned Hawks



2025 Spring Raptor Banding Report—by Jill Heimrich

Once again, Mother Nature gave us a late start this spring. The snow on the ground and inclement weather caused a significant delay in setting up the banding stations, pushing back the start of our 2025 spring banding season until mid-March. As a result, banding was conducted only 9 days in March, leading to a lower-than-usual number of Red-shouldered Hawks banded. The weather began to cooperate in mid-April, leading to several excellent days of banding: April 18 (41 raptors), April 19 (68 raptors), and April 29 (89 raptors). Sharp-shinned Hawk counts were particularly strong on those days, with 35, 68, and 76 individuals banded on those dates respectively. Banding

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numbers can be quite variable from year to year due to several factors, including weather and migration conditions, and volunteer coverage of the banding stations. However, our Spring 2025 numbers were above average for the last 9 years.

Owl banding was conducted on several evenings with favorable migration conditions. We were able to head out on 11 nights, from sunset until no later than 1:00 am, and successfully band four Northern Saw-whet Owls and one Long-eared Owl. A Great Horned Owl gave us a bit of a challenge several times during the season, but our patience and determination paid off—we eventually captured and banded it on the last night of banding!

Birds that are captured here that arrive already wearing a band from another location are called foreign recoveries or recaptures. The data obtained by these recaptures offers valuable insight into dispersal, migration, longevity and behavior. We had a few exciting encounters this year. First, we recaptured a female American Kestrel on 4/20/2025 that was originally banded in the same location, on 3/29/2024 by visiting bander Sue Kaehler, from Cedar Grove Ornithological Research Station in Wisconsin. On 3/18/2025, during owl banding, we recaptured a second-year (SY) Northern Saw-whet Owl that was originally banded as a hatch-year (first year of life) bird on 11/2/2024 at the Braddock Bay Bird Observatory. Due to the short length of time between captures, there is a possibility that this bird overwintered in the Braddock Bay area. Lastly, while out road banding in Braddock Bay on 1/25/2025, we captured a Red-tailed Hawk that we had already banded as a juvenile (second year) bird at one of our banding stations on 3/30/2021. This bird hatched in 2020, making it 5 years old. It was observed with another Red-tailed Hawk, a larger individual likely to be female, which lead us to believe it was most likely breeding in the area. The photos below are from both capture years showing the changes in this hawk’s plumage from juvenile (left) to adult (right).

Raptor Banding Totals 2025	
Red-shouldered Hawk	2
Red-tailed Hawk	47
Northern Harrier	14
Cooper’s Hawk	36
Sharp-shinned Hawk	251
Merlin	1
American Kestrel	33
Eastern Screech Owl	4
Long-eared Owl	1
Northern Saw-whet Owl	4
Great Horned Owl	1
TOTAL	394



We have received seven returns on birds initially banded at Braddock Bay. First was a male American Kestrel, banded as a SY bird on 4/19/2023. He was found on 12/4/2024 with a head injury in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and was taken to a wildlife hospital. After spending 10 days there, he was released back into the wild. A Red-tailed Hawk that was banded as a hatch-year (HY) bird on 8/24/2024 was found stuck in a horse stable at a racing track

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2025 Spring Owl Roost Survey — by Jim Adams

Editor's note: Below are excerpts from the full report on BBRR's Spring Owl Roost Survey 2025 submitted by BBRR survey coordinator Jim Adams. Along with migration timing and comparisons of yearly counts, Jim has also compiled and reported information on location usage. If interested in reading the full report, please contact BBRR at information@bbrr.org.

Summary

The spring of 2025 was an average season for Northern Saw-whet Owls (NSWO, saw-whet) and Long-eared Owls (LEOW, long-ear). Saw-whets had a peak migration push in the middle of March and long-ears had peak migration push during the third week of April. 34 saw-whets and 26 long-ears were counted during the season. The saw-whet season count was below the average of the previous thirteen years and the long-ear season count was just above the average. Both saw-whet and long-ear first seen and last seen dates were typical of recent years on record.



Northern Saw-whet Owl. Photo by Jim Adams

Migration Timing

Figure 1 is a plot of the daily counts and 15 day averages for saw-whets (NSWO) for the season, and Figure 2 is the corresponding plot for long-ears (LEOW). First seen, 15 day peak, last seen, and season counts are given in Table 1. It can be seen that saw-whets had a peak migration push in the middle of March, while long-ears had a peak migration push just after the middle of April. NSWOs had a fairly typical spring migration with 34 owls spotted and the 26 LEOWs found also produced an average season count for that species. Saw-whet movement through Owl Woods largely occurring during the month of March with only 5 owls total found during the months of February, April, and May. Long-ears movement consisted of two main surges: a lesser push during March and a great push during April. Two LEOWs were found in May and the sole long-ear found in February was probably an overwintering owl.

Year-to-Year Count Comparisons

2012 when the current count protocol was adopted, i.e., a team approach with daily surveys for the entire season. The blue bars are the actual count values and the orange line is

Figure 1—Saw-whet Daily Counts and 15 Day Average

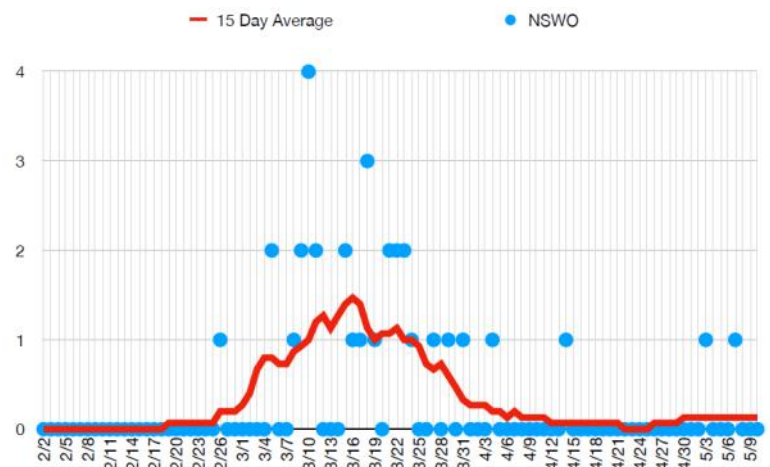
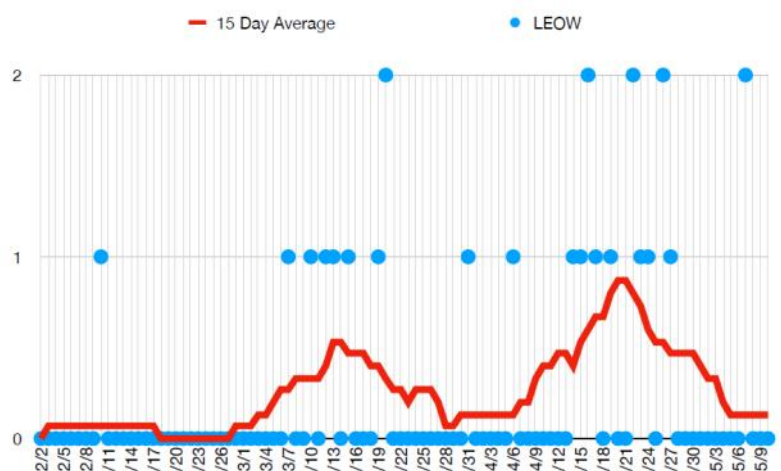


Figure 2—Long-eared Daily Counts and 15 Day Average



(2025 Spring Owl Roost Survey—Continued from page 8)

the trimmed mean count of the blue bars. (The trimmed mean is computed by rejecting the highest and lowest yearly counts and averaging the remaining yearly counts.) The trimmed mean value for saw-whets is 44.0 and for long-ears it is 23.5.

It can be seen in Figure 3 that the saw-whet count was below average but not remarkably so. Also, the six year cycle posited in previous reports was absent, i.e., the big years of 2013 and 2019 were not repeated in 2025. In contrast, Figure 4 shows that the long-car count was just over the trimmed mean. This data is also plotted as

Table 1—First Seen, Last Seen, Peak, and Season Observation Dates and Counts (Continued on page 10)

Species	First Seen	Last Seen	15 Day Peak	Peak Daily Count	Season Count
NSWO	2/26	5/7	3/16	4	34
LEOW	3/7	5/7	4/21	2	26

Figure 3—Year to Year Saw-whet Owl Counts

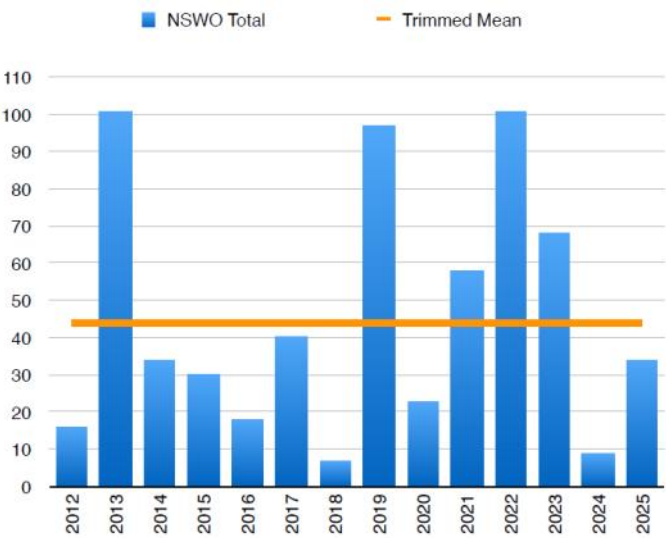


Figure 4—Year to Year Long-eared Owl Counts

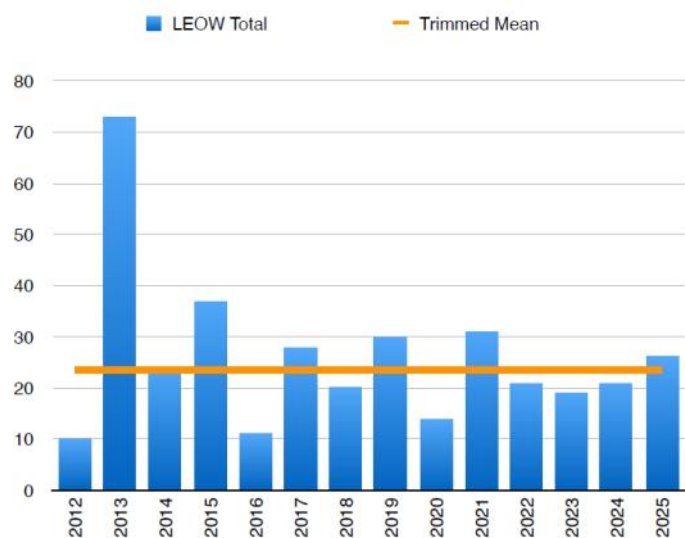


Figure 5—Year to Year NSWOW Count Histogram

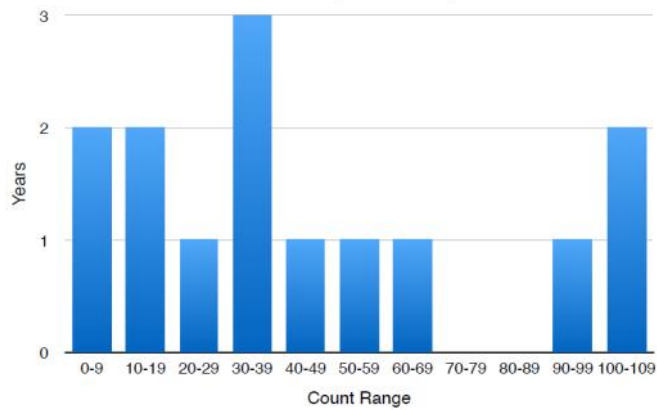
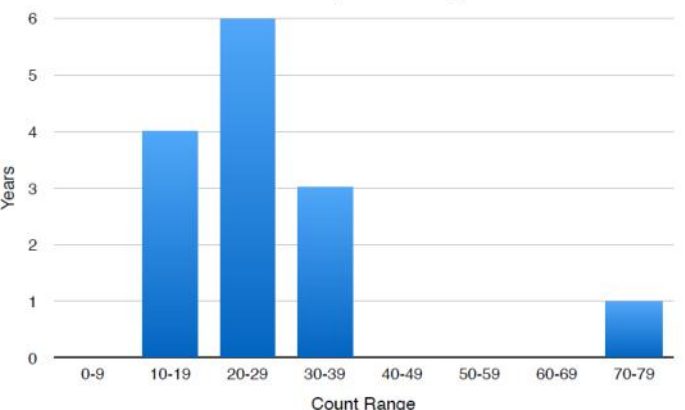


Figure 6—Year to Year LEOW Count Histogram



(2025 Spring Owl Roost Survey—Continued from page 9)

histograms in Figures 5 and 6. In Figure 5 this year’s count of 34 saw-whets populated the 30 to 39 bin for the third time. Figure 6 shows that this year’s count of 26 long-ears falls into the most frequently populated bin, 20 to 29 long-ears, suggesting 2025 was a typical year for long-ears over the range of years shown. Examining in more detail, the daily counts can be smoothed by a 15 day average to more easily compare migration features from year-to-year. Figure 7 is a plot of NSWO 15 day averages for 2012 through 2025. In the plot the most obvious feature of 2025 is the single migration peak that appears a bit early compared to previous years, but not unduly so. The situation for long-ears was slightly more dynamic in Figure 8. 2025 exhibited a secondary migration peak in mid March and a main migration peak during the third week in April. Additionally, the average number of long-ears seen on a daily basis during peak movement was roughly half that seen during previous years (with the obvious exception of 2013 which towers above the other years!)

Year-to-Year Migration Date Comparisons

The table to the right gives the dates over a

Year	NSWO First Seen	NSWO Peak Migration	NSWO Last Seen	LEOW First Seen	LEOW Peak Migration	LEOW Last Seen
2012	3/7	3/13	4/9	3/4	4/10	5/14*
2013	2/24	4/14	5/2	3/11	4/15	5/2
2014	3/12	3/27	5/3	3/17	4/8	5/3
2015	3/19	3/29	4/18	3/21*	4/15	4/30*
2016	3/10	3/19	4/23	3/10**	4/22	4/23
2017	3/2**	4/3	5/6	3/28**	4/12	5/13
2018	2/26	2/26	4/27	3/28	4/24	5/1
2019	2/9	3/21	5/26	2/16	4/16	5/26
2020	2/29	3/14	3/26	4/5	4/10	5/4
2021	2/10	3/17	4/28	2/20	4/29	5/13
2022	2/6	3/15	5/2	2/20	3/26	5/9
2023	2/5	4/4	5/4	3/29	4/3	4/27
2024	2/21	4/15	5/2	2/27	4/13	5/2
2025	2/26	3/16	5/7	3/7**	4/21	5/7

* eBird entry, **excluding probable overwintering birds

Figure 7—15 Day Average Saw-whet Totals

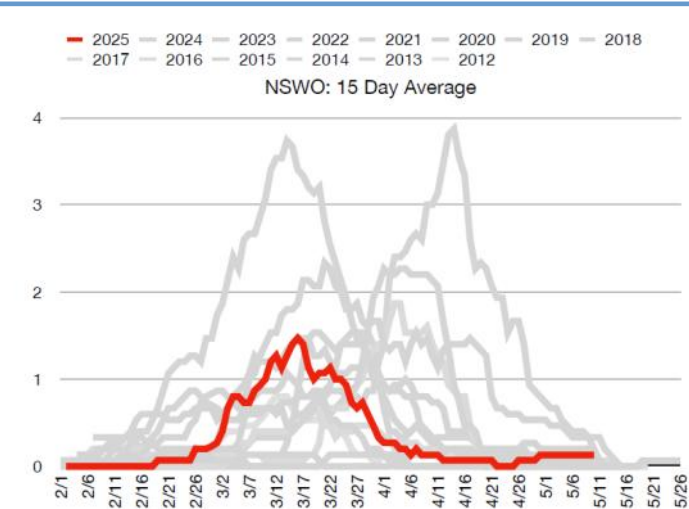
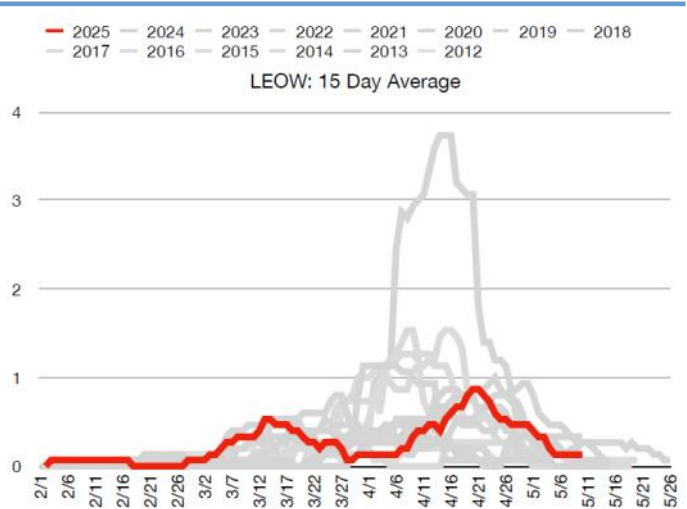


Figure 8—15 Day Average Long-ear Totals



(2025 Spring Owl Roost Survey—Continued from page 10)

series of years for when a species was first seen, peaked in migration, and was last seen at Owl Woods. These dates are a combination of roost survey data and eBird entries, as indicated. These dates are also plotted in Figures 9, 10, and 11.

This year's first seen, peak migration, and last seen dates for the saw-whets were all fairly typical. As a result, the timing of saw-whet migration season in 2025 was on par with recent years. The long-ear first seen, peak migration, and last seen dates for 2025 were also fairly typical. Altogether, as with the saw-whets, long-ear season was representative of recent years and marked no significant changes.

Figures 9, 10, and 11 permit a few more observations of interest. Figure 9 suggests that an earlier trend of later and later first seen dates for long-ears continues to not be supported in 2025. In contrast, saw-whet first seen dates continue a possible trend of moving earlier and earlier over the time period shown. In Figure 10 both long-ear and saw-whet last seen dates appeared to have remained stable over the past decade. Finally, Figure 11 suggests long-ear and saw-whet peak movements have also remained relatively stable over the period shown, despite some of the later peaks for saw-whets. All of these observations are heavily influenced with a significant amount of noise in the data due to year-to-year fluctuations in the weather and other factors that dictate the precise timings of migration. Still, owl migration through Owl Woods appears to be a continually changing phenomenon that bears sustained and detailed attention in order to make the most informed conservation decisions in the habitat management efforts.



Long-eared Owl. Photo by Jim Adams

Figure 9—First Seen Dates

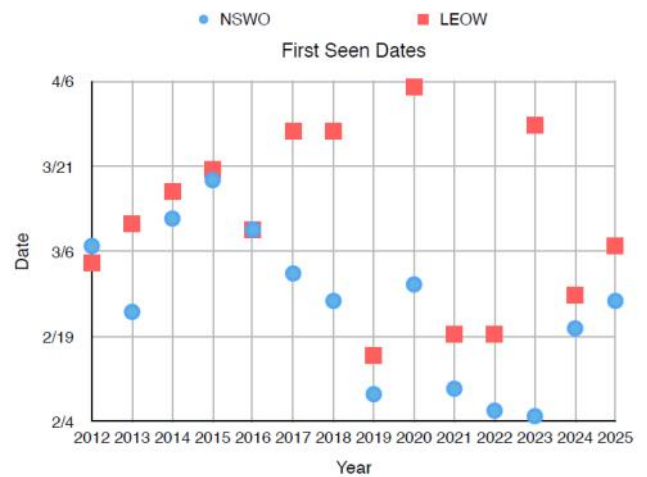


Figure 10—Last Seen Dates

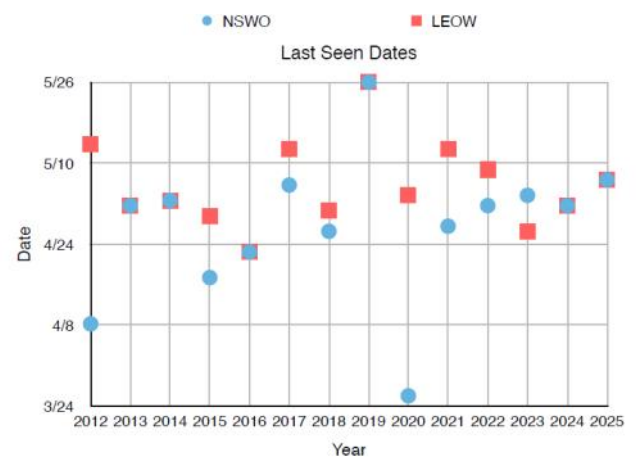
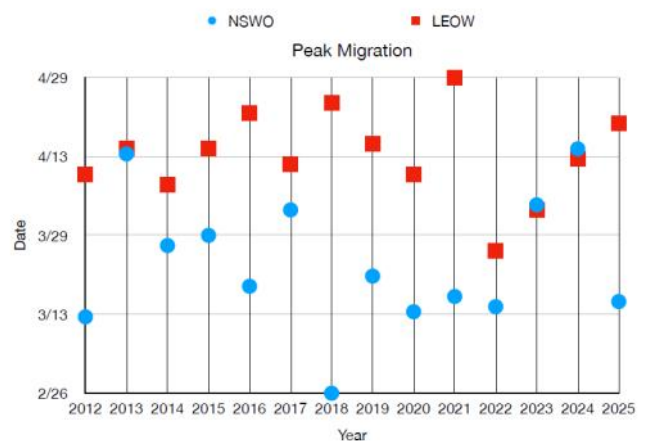


Figure 11—Peak Migration Dates



in Toronto, Canada. It was successfully captured and released back into the wild. A female Eastern Screech Owl banded as an after second year bird on 2/6/2024 was found deceased on the Lake Ontario Parkway on 2/2/2025, very close to where she was originally banded. Two Red-tailed Hawks were found deceased in Ohio. One was banded as a HY bird on 8/27/2024 was found in Medina, Ohio on 2/24/2025, and the other banded as a HY bird on 8/20/2022 was found in Vienna, Ohio. A Sharp-shinned Hawk banded and outfitted with a transmitter as a SY bird on 4/15/2025 and was found five days later in St. Catherine's, Canada. Unfortunately, the bird collided with a window and did not survive.

If you ever find a banded bird, you can report the number on the Bird Banding Lab's website at <https://www.usgs.gov/labs/bird-banding-laboratory>. When this is done, the finder receives a Certificate of Appreciation from the lab, with all of that bird's information that was collected when it was first banded. The bander also receives information about the encounter as well as the bird's current status.

Thank You!

To all who came out to celebrate
Bird of Prey Days 2025 with us!

We are grateful for all our volunteers,
presenters, visitors and the town of Greece
who made it a success!



Save the dates!

**Bird of Prey Days
2026
April 24-26**

Braddock Bay Raptor Research
185 Pond Road
Honeoye Falls, NY 14472

