

## 2017 Migration Summary

The most recent hawk watch season at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) produced a below average migration count of 12,520 birds (Table 1). On the bright side though, that was almost 25% above last year's record low total. Nevertheless it continues a recent trend of low counts since we set our record high count in 2011. One disturbing aspect that no doubt contributed to the low count was the fact that there were nine days when no counter was assigned. That's more than ten percent of the season. For many years we've been able to say that we had complete coverage from the first of March to the middle of May but unfortunately that was not the case this year.

Although four of the days without an assigned counter got partial coverage and a storm effectively covered another, the reduced coverage produced our lowest count hours since 1979. The total was about 100 hours below the long term average of 535 hours. This can partially be explained by the weather that impacted more days this year than I can remember it doing in any past year.

Speaking of the weather, the season got off to a pretty good start with the last few days in February being quite warm. Counts were conducted on three days and 81 birds recorded (Table 2). It then cooled markedly and it was another ten days before a total of 81 was surpassed in March. The following week had a major snowfall and a second storm with the result that by the twentieth of the month, there had been only 165 birds counted during March including just five Red-shouldered and only one Rough-legged Hawk. The Turkey Vultures picked up after that and the remainder of the month had reasonable counts on most days but never a big count (Table 3). Another rain event wiped out the last day of the month. The 160 hours recorded was about 40 to 50 below what we have been generally doing.

Precipitation during March was almost double the normal amount and then in April it got worse. The local weather station recorded 236% of the normal amount for the month, with less than 4 cm of snow. Not all fell during daylight hours but, as is evident in Table 4, there were four days wiped out by rain and two more days without a scheduled counter so the 191 count hours were about 25 below a normal April.

Most of the first half of May was cool and very wet. The temperature never exceeded 20 C, even when it wasn't raining. Once again there was more than double the normal amount of precipitation for the month. Only one of the first six days in the month was at all productive because of the weather. Later, a day without a counter contributed to the total hours counted being the third lowest since 1979 for May (Table 5).

We did manage to tie a record in 2017, one that had previously been reached seven times (2012, 2008, 2002, 2000, 1997, 1994 and 1992) when seventeen species of raptor were counted during the season. Five years ago, I announced in the annual summary that Black Vulture had become our sixteenth raptor to visit regularly. This may have been a little premature as they are not visiting every year as yet but they did make appearances on three days in 2017. In addition, a Swainson's Hawk was seen on May 9th bringing the species total to seventeen. A possible Mississippi Kite on May 11th would have set a new record but it was not recorded so we're left with a tie.

The Turkey Vultures were certainly moving very early with 37 recorded before March. Normally the first of them shows up around the fifth of March. By contrast Rough-legged Hawks were rather late this year. Their best day coincided with the first good flight of Broad-winged Hawks on April 13 when normally they would have moved through in March. A late bird was seen on May 9th. The first Broad-winged Hawk arrived on April 9, on the early side of normal by a few days.

While it would not be meaningful to compare this year's data with prior years when there was complete coverage, some trends can be noted. First some good news in that for the third year in a row, the number of American Kestrels seen has increased. Historically, the total is still low for Beamer but at least the current trend is upward. By contrast, Braddock Bay near Rochester has had quite stable counts of the species in recent years albeit much below their counts in the last century.

The Red-shouldered Hawk count was the second lowest since 1975, only last year's count being lower. Only one of the days during which this species passes was not covered so it is unlikely many were missed. By contrast, Derby Hill at the eastern end of Lake Ontario had their second-highest count of this species since 1995.

Turkey Vultures comprised 47.9% of the year's total. This compares to 48.3% last year, 52.0% in 2015 and 62.8% in 2014. This species count has been increasing steadily since the watch began but may finally be starting to level off. However it should be noted that both Braddock Bay and Derby Hill set record high counts of Turkey Vultures this year.

A good crowd, including some young birders on an Ontario Field Ornithologists outing, witnessed the biggest count of the year on April 23rd when 1,381 birds were recorded. That day had twelve species including Black Vulture but the prize for best variety goes to Sandy Darling on May 9th who had thirteen species including a Swainson's Hawk among 109 birds in total.

As always our thanks is extended to everyone who helped with the counts this year and in particular to the following who served as designated counters on at least part of one day: Barry Cheriére, Sandy Darling, Chris Escott, Tim Foran, Eric Geneen, Eric Holden, Gord Kozak, Kevin McLaughlin, Matt Mills, Brian Mishell, George Naylor, Darren Smillie, John Stevens, Mike Street, Tom Thomas, and Phil Waggett.

**John Stevens**  
**August 2017**

**2017 NIAGARA PENINSULA HAWKWATCH MONTHLY COUNTS**

<b>Species</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Black Vulture</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Turkey Vulture</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2036</b>	<b>3762</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>5995</b>
<b>Osprey</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Bald Eagle</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Northern Harrier</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Sharp-shinned Hawk</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>971</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>1144</b>
<b>Cooper's Hawk</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Northern Goshawk</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Red-shouldered Hawk</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>Broad-winged Hawk</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3263</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>3330</b>
<b>Swainson's Hawk</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Red-tailed Hawk</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>1279</b>
<b>Rough-legged Hawk</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Golden Eagle</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>American Kestrel</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Merlin</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Gyr Falcon</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Unidentified Accipiter</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Unidentified Buteo</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Unidentified Falcon</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Unidentified Eagle</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Unidentified Raptor</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Total Raptors</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>3063</b>	<b>8930</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>12520</b>
<b>Hours Counted</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>160.6</b>	<b>191.3</b>	<b>75.7</b>	<b>439.8</b>
<b>Raptors/Hour</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>28.5</b>