

# Spring Raptor Migration Summary 2007

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Four watchsites reported counts for spring 2007 (Tables 1 and 2). A total of 5,731 raptors representing 16 species were counted. The passage rate for all species for the four sites ranged from 3.1 to 4.9 raptors per hour (mean = 4.0). Count effort (hours of observation) for the four watchsites totaled 1,443 hours, ranging from 274 to 455 hours among the sites. There was some variation in count effort among the four sites, with Allegheny Front and Tussey Mountain counting for a week in February and all of March, whereas Rose Tree Park started their count in the second half of March and Hawk Mountain counted on only five days in March. All of the sites counted throughout April, but only Allegheny Front and Hawk Mountain extended counts into May.

## Composition of the flight

Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*) made up 24% of the overall flight (range 14 - 45%), and their migration peaked in the second half of April. Broad-winged Hawks were the most common species at both Hawk Mountain (45% of overall count) and Rose Tree Park (29% of overall count). Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) made up 19% of the overall flight (range 7.7 - 26%), and their migration peaked in late March. Red-tailed Hawks were the most common species counted at Allegheny Front (25% of overall count) and Tussey Mountain (26%).

Turkey Vultures were the

third most abundant species overall, making up 11% of the total count (range of 0.5 - 14%). Turkey Vultures were seen as early as February, with most individuals passing in March (Table 2). Sharp-shinned Hawks (*Accipiter striatus*), a species whose migration peaked in late March and into April, made up 13% of the overall flight, followed by Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), whose migration peaked in late April and made up 7.3% of the overall flight. At all sites, Ospreys were first seen in mid- to late March, with the earliest sighting on 15 March at Rose Tree Park. Red-shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) totaled 151 individuals (2.6% of overall flight) and peaked in March. Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) totaled 118 individuals among the sites and made up 2.1% of the flight.

A total of nine Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) were counted (1 at Allegheny Front and 8 at Rose Tree Park), together with a total of 16 Merlins (*F. columbarius*). Sixty-three percent of the 196 American Kestrels seen (*F. sparverius*) were counted in April. For kestrels, the overall rate of passage was 0.14 birds per hour, which is nearly twice that of 2006 (0.08), possibly signaling a population rebound. Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) were the earliest migrants; 97% of all Golden Eagles counted were detected in February and March, with Tussey Mountain and Allegheny Front accounting for most of them (152 and 76, respectively).

through 7 May, with a total of 455 hours of observation. The season started out with cold temperatures and snow, with only 16 birds counted during the seven days in February. The count picked up in March with 47 birds counted in just the first two days, totaling 1,157 by the end of the month. The season ended with 1,969 birds counted, compared with a 5-year average of 1,830 birds. The most common species counted were Red-tailed Hawks (489), followed by Broad-winged Hawks (327), Turkey Vultures (268), and Sharp-shinned Hawks (265). Season records (since 2002) were set for Bald Eagles (26), Black Vultures (26), and Sharp-shinned Hawks (265). Golden Eagles (76) were back up after 3 years of being below the season average. Several other birds were above the 5-year average, including Ospreys (135), Cooper's Hawks (85), Red-shouldered Hawks (72), Red-tailed Hawks (489), Rough-legged Hawks (4), and American Kestrels (27).

**Hawk Mountain Sanctuary** (Berks and Schuylkill Counties) – The three Golden Eagles counted on 9 March were the only Golden Eagles counted at the site. Warmer temperatures brought 46 birds on 2 April, including 13 Red-tailed Hawks, 9 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 8 Cooper's Hawks, and 6 Northern Harriers. Another 24 birds were counted on 3 April. The peak of the migration began on 21 April when 72 birds were counted, including 29 Broad-winged Hawks, 12 Ospreys, and 1 Merlin. 28 April was the peak day, with 263 raptors counted, including 187 Broad-winged Hawks, 36 Ospreys, 16 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 11 Red-tailed Hawks, 8 Cooper's Hawks, 2 Northern Harriers, and 1 Bald Eagle. The numbers of birds decreased thereafter, with a high count of 22 birds on 2 May. From 4 through 13 May, the count

## Seasonal Highlights

**Allegheny Front** (Bedford County) – The count started on 22 February and c o n t i n u e d

Table 1. Watchsites reporting for spring 2007.

Watchsite	County	Hours of observation
Allegheny Front	Bedford	455
Hawk Mountain	Berks-Schuylkill	274
Rose Tree Park	Delaware	294
Tussey Mountain	Centre	420

tapered to single digits, and ended with a grand total of 1,042 raptors, and a new season record (since 1998) for Red-shouldered Hawks (20).

**Rose Tree Park** (Delaware County) – The count began on 13 March and finished on 30 April, recording a total of 1,432 birds. The peak day was 21 April, when a total of 195 birds were counted, including 77 Broad-winged Hawks, 50 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 17 American Kestrels, 8 Northern Harriers, and 5 Bald Eagles. Three days later on 24 April, 138 Broad-winged Hawks were counted, making this the peak day for the species. Season records were set for Cooper's Hawks (85) and Peregrine Falcons (8). Several other birds were above the 5-year average, including Bald Eagles (63), Black Vultures (49), Sharp-shinned Hawks (216), Northern Goshawks (3), Red-shouldered Hawks (21), and Red-tailed Hawks (110). Broad-winged

Hawks (420) and Turkey Vultures (169) had lower counts compared with the 5-year averages (1346 and 253, respectively). All other species were on par with their 5-year averages.

**Tussey Mountain** (Centre County) – Red-tailed Hawks (334), Broad-winged Hawks (178), Turkey Vultures (179), Golden Eagles (152), and Sharp-shinned Hawks (151) were the most common birds seen at Tussey Mountain this spring. The peak period of migration for Broad-wings was 19-23 April, with a high of 68 Broad-wings passing through on 20 April, along with a season high count of 15 Ospreys. Turkey Vultures (25) peaked on 2 March, whereas the high count for Red-shouldered Hawks (11) was on 12 March, and high counts for Red-tailed Hawks (37), American Kestrels (8), Sharp-shinned Hawks (30), and Cooper's Hawks (8) were on 25 March. Peak

flights of Golden Eagles occurred in mid-March, with a total of 152 counted for the season. One season record was 29 Bald Eagles by the end of April.

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## Answer to Photo Quiz #16

Rick Wiltraut

This bird has a long, black bill and appears to be a tern. Note the very long wings which are brownish-gray above. Also note the whitish underparts. On the underwing, note that the dark remiges contrast with the whitish coverts forming a distinct border along the rear edge of the wing. If you look closely, you can see that the base of the primaries on the underwing are white. Juvenile and non-breeding Black Tern are similar but have a gray underwing and much shorter tail. Adult Black Skimmer is dark above and white below, but has an unmistakable large red and black bill and lacks the dark border along the rear edge of the wing. Adult Sooty Tern is very similar to this bird, but has a darker (blackish) upperwing. Also, adult Sooty Tern has darker primaries on the underwing, which contrast more sharply with the whitish coverts.

This juvenile Bridled Tern was among 23 seen near Wilmington Canyon on a trip out of Cape May, New Jersey, Sept. 3, 2000, the highest number ever recorded in the mid-Atlantic region. The birds were found in very warm water (up to 80 degrees F) and were found feeding in large floating mats of *Sargassum*. *Sargassum* harbors large quantities of marine life including small fish, and the Bridled Tern has as a close bond to this floating plant. Bridled Tern has yet to be documented in Pennsylvania and should be looked for after hurricanes, especially along the lower Delaware River.

