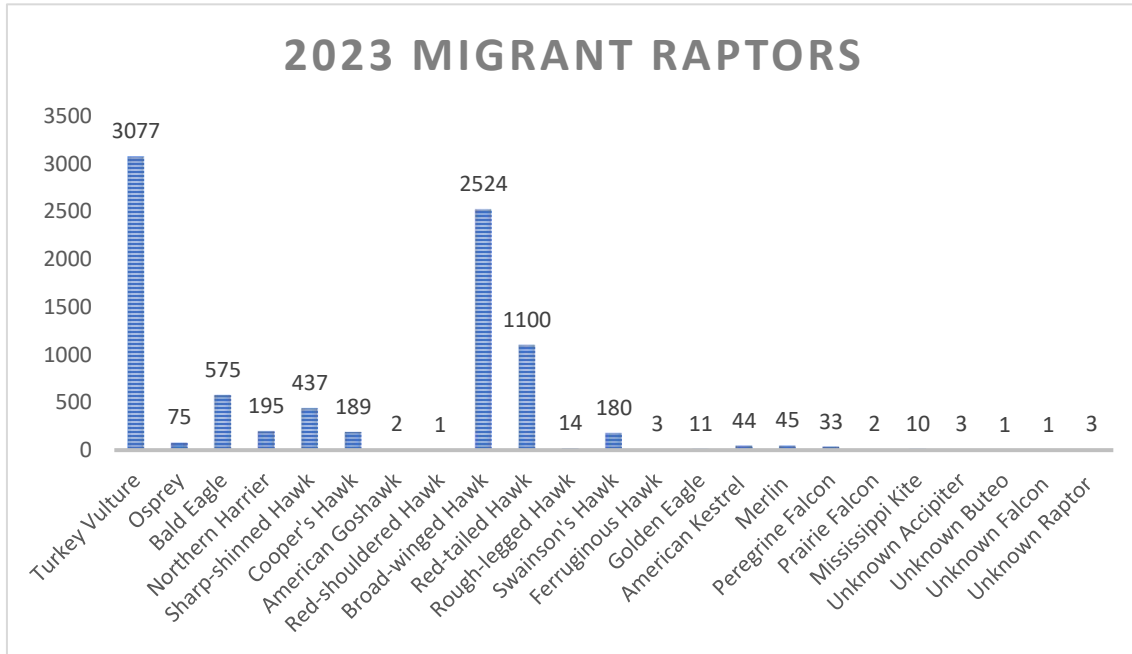


# Hitchcock Nature Center Hawkwatch Report, Fall 2023

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## Season Overview

This fall a total of 8,525 migrant raptors were counted at the Hitchcock Nature Center Hawkwatch. As expected, the diversity of raptors counted this year was 19 species. 782 hours of count time was logged, making the passage rate for the season 10.9 raptors per hour. This season was a slow season and an interesting one at that. The fall was overall notably warmer than previous years. The latter half was particularly warmer with a week in November that peaked to high 60s and a few days in early December reaching similar conditions. Mid-season, there were a few days that were rained out and early December had a few days with very light snow fall. The season also started off with prolonged stretches of strong southerly winds. Area smoke from the large forest fires in Canada accounted for poor visibility, especially during the beginning of the season. These factors, in addition to a continued localized drought, could have contributed to the slow season here this fall. Numbers for Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, American Kestrels, and several other raptor species were lower than expected. Two species in particular, Red-tailed Hawks and Red-shouldered Hawks, were notably lower. This year's count for Red-tailed Hawks was the second lowest it has been (2018, being the record low year). The count for Red-shouldered hawks this year matched the record low count from 2013. It was also observed that the movement of the raptors trended towards delayed pushes. On a positive note, this year Hitchcock had an overall record count for Broad-winged Hawks! The bulk of

which moved through on two record count days in late September. This year's overall slowness is why the continued effort from this hawkwatch, and many like it, is paramount to track and understand raptor populations and movement throughout the continent.

### **Turkey Vulture – 3077**

The count for Turkey Vultures this year was as expected and close to the average count for this species here at Hitchcock. They were first counted on 09/01 and last counted 11/08. The highest count day occurred on 10/15 with 423 birds counted. Most of the Turkey Vultures were counted by 10/24 with a few lingering birds coming in sporadically.

### **Osprey – 75**

The count for Ospreys was below the average by about 35.3 %. They were first counted on 09/02 and last counted on 10/27. Ospreys were late to move this year. The highest count day was on 10/01 with 16 birds counted.

### **Bald Eagle – 575**

The count for Bald Eagles was below average by about 25.03%. Most of the Bald Eagles that were counted came through late in the season as expected. Good pushes of Bald Eagles were on day when the winds were strong and from the north/northwest. The species was first counted on 09/02 and last counted on 12/12. The highest count occurred on 12/09 with 110 birds counted.

### **Northern Harrier – 195**

The count for Northern Harriers this year was slightly below average by about 12.6 %. They were first counted on 09/02 and last counted on 11/26. The highest count day occurred on 11/07 with 18 birds counted.

### **Sharp-shinned Hawk – 437**

The count for Sharp-shinned Hawks this year was below average by about 47.0%. The species was first counted on 09/05 and last counted on 12/02. The highest count day occurred on 09/30 with 33 birds counted.

### **Cooper's Hawk – 189**

The count for Cooper's Hawk was below average by 23.8%. The species was first counted on 09/01 and last counted on 11/27. The highest count occurred on 10/11 with 19 birds counted.

### **American Goshawk – 2**

The count for this species was lower than expected. Of the two raptors counted this year, one was a first-year and the other was an adult. The first-year bird came in right above tree tops and the adult bird was spotted going over high. First counted on 10/13 and then later on 11/10.

#### **Red-shouldered Hawk – 1**

The count for Red-shouldered Hawk was below average by 83.3%. This matches 2013 as the lowest count for this species at HNC. The single count for this year occurred on 10/02

#### **Broad-winged Hawk – 2524**

This year was a very good Broad-winged year at Hitchcock. The count was above the average by 220.3 %. The species was first counted on 09/08 and last counted on 10/09. There were two record count days this year. The first record count day occurred on 09/28 with 1206 birds counted! The following day, 09/29, was the second record count day with 986 birds counted. This species started showing up later in season and peak count occurred about a week later than expected. When they arrived this year, they arrived in good numbers. This is a species that looks to be trending towards increased counts here at Hitchcock, and it will be interesting to see how the numbers will look like in the future.

#### **Red-tailed Hawk – 1100**

The count for Red-tailed Hawks this year was below average by about 54.9%. This was the second lowest the count for Red-tailed Hawks has ever been here. The species started moving in good numbers later than expected. They were first counted on 09/02 and last counted on 12/12. The highest count occurred on 10/27 with 139 birds counted.

#### **Rough-legged Hawk – 14**

The count for Rough-legged Hawks was below average by about 53.3%. This was lower than expected. The species was first counted on 11/05 and last counted on 12/06. The highest count occurred on 11/26 with 3 birds counted.

#### **Swainson's Hawk – 180**

Though this year's count is below average, the count for this species is variable here at Hitchcock and dependent on how weather systems from the west blows in early in the season. This species was first counted on 09/26 and last counted on 10/07. The highest count occurred on 10/03 with 86 birds counted.

#### **Ferruginous Hawk – 3**

The count this year was above the average. The species was first counted on 10/06 and last counted on 12/01. The peak of movement this year was later in the season. The last two birds came in towards the end of November and beginning of December.

#### **Golden Eagle – 11**

The count was below average for Golden Eagles this year. The species was first counted on 10/16 and last counted on 12/09. The highest count was on 12/09 with 2 birds counted.

#### **American Kestrel – 44**

The count for this species was below the average by about 58.5%. This was lower than expected. The earlier days of the season when this species was at peak migration had hazier conditions. This could potential mean the far-out low flying individuals could have easily been missed. The species was first counted on 09/01 and last counted on 10/15. The highest count occurred on 09/06 with 6 birds counted.

#### **Merlin – 45**

The count for this species this year was about average. The species was first counted on 10/6, and last counted on 11/28. The highest count occurred on 10/6 with 6 birds counted.

#### **Peregrine Falcon – 33**

The count for this species was lower than expected and their arrival was later than anticipated this year. The count was below the average by about 35.3%. The species was first counted on 09/18 and last counted on 11/12. The highest count occurred on 09/30 with 11 birds counted.

#### **Prairie Falcon – 2**

The count of 2 Prairie Falcon this season is close to what is expected as Prairie Falcons are a rare sighting here at Hitchcock. They were counted mid- and late-season on 10/18 and 12/6.

#### **Mississippi Kite – 10**

The count for this species this year was above what was expected. The species was first counted on 09/04 and last counted 09/30. The highest count day was on 09/04 with 3 birds counted.

Unknown Accipiter – 3

Unknown Buteo – 1

Unknown Flacon – 1

Unknown Raptor – 3