

MIGRATION TRAPPING OF HAWKS AT CAPE MAY, N.J. - SECOND YEAR  
By William S. Clark

This article reports the results of this Fall's (1968) hawk trapping at Cape May Point, New Jersey. (See Clark, 1968 for the first year's results.)

Throughout, I shall use the more esthetic and appropriate names of Kestrel for Sparrow Hawk, Merlin for Pigeon Hawk, and Peregrine Falcon for Duck Hawk. The two latter falcons are subspecies of European species having the preferred names, while the former is more closely related to Falco tinnunculus, the European Kestrel, than to Accipiter nisus, the Sparrow Hawk, for which it was misnamed. It is indeed a shame that the recommendation of Peterson in his famous Field Guide has so long gone unheeded.

The Trapping Station. Because the trapping method employed for flying hawks is much different from the mist net setup so many of us are familiar with, the following brief description of the hawk trapping station is included.

The station is located at Cape May Point, within sight of the lighthouse. A blind is used to prevent the hawks from seeing the trapper. It is situated on the western side of a plowed field which is about fifty yards wide. The blind faces to the east and is about ten yards from the field. The primary lure for the flying hawks is a pigeon which is harnessed in a leather jacket. Attached to the jacket are two lines, one of which comes to the blind through a bow trap (see Meng, 1963 for a description), and the other line returns to the blind after passing through two guides located at the top and bottom of a pole. These two lines are joined at the blind. This arrangement allows the trapper to "fly" the pigeon when a hawk is seen in the air by pulling on the second of the described lines. (The pigeon in this rig appears injured to the hawk, and his predatory instinct is aroused.)

If the hawk decides to "stoop", the pigeon is brought back to the center of the bow trap by pulling on the first of the above-mentioned lines. (The bow trap is located out in the plowed field.) If the hawk continues his stoop and "binds" to the pigeon, the bow trap is set off and the hawk captured. The trapper then leaves the blind to retrieve the bird for banding and subsequent release. However, most hawks do not bind, but only "zip" across the lure. In order to catch these hawks, two large mist nets (Bleitz #15) are placed behind the bow trap, one atop the other. This gives coverage from just above the ground to a height of 15 feet, with sufficient bag to take hawks up to the size of a Red-tailed Hawk.

This was the basic setup used at the station last year. This year, a pair of smaller bow traps, baited with House Sparrows, were used. These lure birds were also encased in leather jackets attached with two lines





Table 2. Trapping Results by Method

Species	Mist Net	Small Bow-trap	Large Bow-trap
Kestrel	43	68	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	19	12	
Merlin	19	1	1
Cooper's Hawk	2	4	1
Red-tailed Hawk			2
Peregrine Falcon	3		
Red-shouldered Hawk			1

Table 3. Daily Summary of Hawk Passes at the Station

SPECIES	SEPTEMBER										OCTOBER											
	14	15	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	20	21
KESTREL	55	12	4	14	21	26	7	60	35	21	10	4	6	3	7	2	2		3	2	34	15
MERLIN	4	3	1	1	7	2	1	10	8	1				1	1	1	1		2		2	1
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	3	2	1		1	4	1	2	2	3	2	1	2		7	2	4		2	4	13	1
COOPER'S HAWK					1			1	2			3	3	1		1		1	6	4	2	1
RED-TAILED HAWK	1	1										1	1			1			1			
MARSH HAWK	3				1	1		3		2					1							5
BROAD-WINGED HAWK											1	1	1									
PEREGRINE FALCON										1												
TOTAL ALL SPECIES	66	18	6	15	31	33	9	76	47	28	13	10	13	5	15	7	7	1	14	10	51	23

Table 4. Daily Summary of Hawks Seen at the Station (Exclusive of hawks that were caught or that made passes)

	SEPTEMBER										OCTOBER											
	14	15	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	20	21
KESTREL	64	67	34	88	141	72	18	297	141	29	34	18	21	12	25	9	11	3	19	19	194	81
MERLIN	8	5	2	2	9		4	22	16	4	1	1		3	3	3	2	1	11		19	3
PEREGRINE FALCON	4				4	1		3	4				1	2		1	1	4				
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	28	13	18	33	49	29	13	61	52	44	16	40	14	11	41	29	17	25	36	69	124	78
COOPER'S HAWK		3			1	4		2	5	5	6	7	5	2	13	8	5	20	35	27	28	12
RED-TAILED HAWK	12	1				1		2		1	3	3	2			1	1	2	2	3		5
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK						1							1								2	
BROAD-WINGED HAWK	60		1		24	22	11	116	33	66	91	163	4		25	20		3	6		2	6
MARSH HAWK	22	7	2	2	5	14		19	9	12	2	3	4		4	1	1	1	3	2	6	49
OSPREY	5	1		1	7	4		1	4	3	3	1		4	3	4		6	1	1	1	1



opposite was true for the smaller bird-eating hawks. My explanation for these results is that these latter species are more accustomed to capturing prey in the air, while the former spends much time on the ground.

Table 3 is a summary of hawk "passes" at the station. A pass is recorded when the flying hawk leaves its intended flight path and approaches the immediate station area in a stoop. Table 1 may be consulted for wind conditions and hours operated for any given day.

Table 4 gives a daily summary of all hawks identified from the station. Any hawk recorded as a pass or actually caught is not included in this table. There were many hawks not identified as to species due to being too distant or by the trapper being occupied working the lures. For the latter reason also, many hawks were probably missed in this count by not being seen.

The accompanying photographs were taken during this Fall's trapping at the station.

Interesting Experiences. When operating a station such as the one described here, many unusual events occur. The more interesting of these are described below.

The first happened when returning from the initial weekend's trapping. After driving about twenty miles from Cape May, a field was spied which contained more than fifty Kestrels, hovering, flying or perched on a telephone wire which ran through the center of the field. It was late in the afternoon, but six Bal-chatri traps were quickly loaded with mice in order that a few of these small falcons might be trapped before dark.



Male Kestrel in the Mist Net



Immature Female Merlin

The result surpasses anything that I have ever experienced during the considerable time spent trapping hawks using this method. Twenty-two of these hawks were caught and banded in the hour and a half before dark, including three double catches, i.e. two birds on one trap at the same time.

The second occurred when the wind was very strong and it broke one of the support poles for the mist nets. Larry Hood, who was assisting me that day, ran out of the blind and picked up the fallen pole to prevent the nets from becoming too fouled in the underbrush. In the meantime, I had gone back to my car to get some equipment to fix the broken pole. Then I heard him yell for me to come back quickly, and upon running back to the trapping area, I found a Sharp-shinned Hawk in the now upright net, not ten feet from Larry. And he could not remove the bird, having his hands full. The hawk just happened to be flying by.

On another occasion, when there weren't many hawks flying and the lures had not been worked for some time I noticed that a hawk had "captured" my pigeon. I quickly set off the trigger for the bow trap, but the trap did not go off. In order to try to get him to fly into the mist net I flew the pigeon, but this tenacious hawk clung, and for about five minutes he could not be shook off of his catch. This was very unusual for a Broad-winged Hawk, which I had now recognized that he was. I then ran out of the blind hoping to confuse the hawk and get him to fly into the net, but he did not flush off the pigeon until I was almost upon him. And then the reason for his behavior became evident - he wore the jesses and bells of a falconer's hawk. From my friends who pursue this avocation, I've learned that I probably could have just walked up and picked up this escapee. And what's more amazing is that the pigeon did not have a scratch.

Many times the stooping hawks have flown under the mist nets, which just clear the ground, but the most enterprising hawk was a Merlin that flew through the small gap that existed between the two nets. After this episode I attached these together with three ties, instead of the one previously used.

Quite a few of the smaller hawks, especially the male Kestrels, hit the mist net with their wings folded, and the head and the wings enter through the same square in the net. In a few seconds of squirming they can free themselves by falling through. As most are coming toward the blind, many are frightened by the trapper running out and they turn around and fly back into the net. However, the most unusual of these "fall-throughs" occurred when Brad Mitchell ran out of the blind to retrieve a Merlin in the net. Just as he arrived at the net, the hawk fell through and went to the ground. But before he could fly away, he was pounced upon by my enthusiastic helper.

One must also mention negative experiences, and my most negative results occurred on the day that the Banding Office gentlemen, Earl and



Larry, came to see some hawks trapped. In fact, it was my only zero day! Earl asked me where I buried the bands I supposedly put on hawks ... in jest, of course.

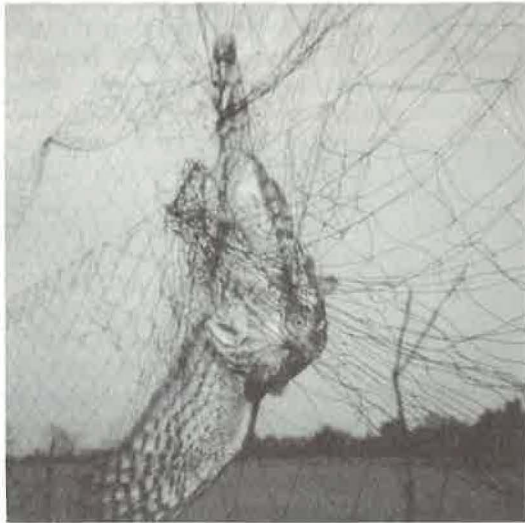
It is possible to visit the station, by making arrangements with me previously, but uninvited visitors are necessarily not welcomed at the station while trapping. It is planned to use many signs warning people to stay clear.

Future Plans. Next Fall, 1969, I plan to operate the station for a season of at least six weeks. Other banders will participate in this expanded endeavor. Emphasis will be placed on gathering data on the factors which govern the hawk flights at Cape May as well as trying to improve the trapping totals by modifying techniques and equipment.

The author wishes to thank Messrs. John Holt, Bob Robertsen and Daniel Berger for suggestions and help in learning the basic techniques of hawk trapping and in the construction and use of the necessary equipment. Also, to thank the following persons for assistance given at the trapping station: Messrs. Pete Davis, John Getgood, Larry Hood, Brad Mitchell, and V. Edwin Unger. And special thanks are due to Mr. George Hitchner, who runs the O.R. station at Cape May Point, for his assistance in many details, including obtaining permission to trap on the property.



Immature female Cooper's Hawk caught in large bow trap



Immature male Cooper's Hawk - very tangled in the net.

(All photos by the author)

#### Literature Cited:

Clark, W.S., 1968. Migration Trapping of Hawks at Cape May, N.J. EBBA News, 31:3, pp. 112-144

Meng, H., 1963. Radio Controlled Hawk Trap. EBBA News, 26:5, pp. 185-188. (Reprinted from The Journal, North American Falconers' Association)

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#### A SISKIN INVASION AND A REMARKABLE RECOVERY By Maurice Broun

During the winter and early spring of 1964 the headquarters area of the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary was literally taken over by Pine Siskins. A dozen or so of the birds appeared in late January; at least 200 were present by late February; well over 400 swarmed at the feeders during March; the show continued into the first week of May, then tapered off rapidly until the last bird departed on May 21.

Walnut screenings were the great attraction, but sunflower seeds, suet, even doughnuts were consumed by the invading hosts of Siskins. Utterly fearless, aggressive, the birds would flutter about me, take food from my outstretched hands - until I began a systematic banding of the birds; then they became cautious.

The sassy Siskins swarming at our smorgasbord were the feature of the season, charming our many visitors. And the eager sprites enabled me to carry on continuous banding demonstrations for the edification of our numerous visiting groups.

I trapped and banded 550 Siskins though well over 600 birds must have sojourned with us. They were inveterate repeaters, a few up to 8 times. Two Siskins came to us already banded: the first, on February 13, had been banded March 16, 1963 at Washington Crossing State Park, by Dr. Paul Fluck; the second bird, on April 15, had been banded two months earlier, at Murray Hill, N.J. (18 miles west of Manhattan) by Darwin Wood.

Of all that throng of Siskins banded during those memorable weeks, one bird only has been recovered: history-making 108-08458, banded on May 2. This bird was "found dead" apparently, nearly 20 months later, on December 30, 1965, clear across the continent at Seattle, Washington, as reported by a Mr. B. Vanderpol of that city.

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