

## **2013 Spring Raptor Migration at Fort Smallwood Park, Anne Arundel County, Maryland**

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The total of 11,320 raptors in the spring of 2013 surpassed last year's total by nearly 4000 and was more than 1000 above the ten-year average (2003-2012) (Table 1). Vultures comprised most of the recovery with record-high counts of 553 Black Vultures and 7354 Turkey Vultures, smashing their previous highs. The dramatically low counts of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks were unexpected. The maximum daily count of Sharp-shinned Hawks was only 84, the lowest on record, and the seasonal count of 845 was the lowest since 1982 when there were only 71 hours of coverage. The seasonal Cooper's Hawk total of 271 was the lowest since 1992, again when the coverage was much reduced. Mississippi Kites rebounded to set both daily and seasonal highs, at 9 and 16 respectively. Bald Eagles capped out the season at 168, which was 38 over the previous high count. Coverage for the season was more than adequate at 555 hours, 49 hours above the five-year average (2008-2012).

**February:** What a difference a day makes! A cliché, admittedly, but applied with pleasure to the 2013 season. Seasonal coverage began on 15 February 2013, and an obliging Red-tailed Hawk flew by. February turned out to be prophetic with 222 raptors counted, the most in that month since 1998. Turkey Vultures beat their ten-year average by the greatest margin, but there were also healthy counts of Black Vultures, Bald Eagles, and Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks. On 28 February, the first Ospreys (2) were observed, tying last year's date for early arrival.

**March:** Strong numbers continued throughout March, with vultures again producing tallies significantly above their ten-year averages, along with Red-shouldered Hawks and Ospreys. However, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks were down by 43% and 58% respectively. Also down were Northern Harriers (50%), Red-tailed Hawks (36%), and American Kestrels (51%). A special appearance on 11 March was a Golden Eagle, a probable adult. Single Golden Eagles have now been observed in four of the last five seasons.

**April:** April's numbers were somewhat below average (by 400+ out of 4700+), although vulture and Bald Eagle tallies were again robust. But Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks were again down, this time by 57% and 39% compared to their ten-year averages. Northern Harriers continued to be far below average and

**Table 1. 2013 Monthly and Seasonal Count Summaries, Five-year Count Averages (2008-2012), and Ten-year Count Averages (2003-2012).** (Due to the rounding off of the individual five-year and ten-year species averages, they do not necessarily add up to the total five-year and ten-year averages.)

Survey Days and Hours	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total	Five-year	Ten-year
	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013	Average (2008-2012)	Average (2003-2012)
Survey Days	8	26	27	25	7	93	90	85
Survey Hours	30.00	135.25	182.75	181.75	25.25	555	506	466
<b>Species</b>								
Black Vulture	12	247	242	52	0	553	400	312
Turkey Vulture	177	3558	2650	941	28	7354	5316	5012
Osprey	2	163	281	82	4	532	478	477
Swallow-tailed Kite	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi Kite	0	0	0	16	0	16	6	5
Bald Eagle	6	24	45	90	3	168	120	92
Northern Harrier	0	8	51	12	0	71	97	113
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	63	706	75	0	845	1807	2039
Cooper's Hawk	4	59	177	31	0	271	432	488
Northern Goshawk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Red-Shouldered Hawk	11	164	80	2	0	257	190	180
Broad-winged Hawk	0	0	114	526	5	645	763	787
Swainson's Hawk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Red-tailed Hawk	9	69	125	45	1	249	233	273
Rough-legged Hawk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Golden Eagle	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
American Kestrel	0	50	221	2	0	273	267	353
Merlin	0	8	26	5	0	39	54	63
Peregrine Falcon	0	0	2	4	0	6	5	5
Unidentified Accipiter	0	3	7	4	0	14	15	15
Unidentified Buteo	0	4	2	2	0	8	12	10
Unidentified Eagle	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Unidentified Falcon	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Unidentified Raptor	0	8	1	8	0	17	17	21
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>4429</b>	<b>4731</b>	<b>1897</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>11,320</b>	<b>10,220</b>	<b>10,251</b>

Broad-winged Hawk numbers were also depressed. On the other hand, 2 April was a delight when the daily count topped 1000 for the first time since 2009. Turkey Vultures made up the bulk of the 1021 total for the day.

May: Numbers rebounded to above average in May, with similar trends in species counts as in April except that Mississippi Kites, Red-tailed Hawks, and immature Broad-winged Hawks made strong showings. The first Mississippi Kites (2) were counted on 9 May, but 21 May was the day of good fortune, when between 1200 and 1400 hours, 9 flew past the hawk watch, eclipsing the previous record of 6. By the time the season ended, 16 had been counted, one higher than the previous record.

June: Seven days of observation in June produced an above-average 41 raptors, dominated by Turkey Vultures.

Other raptor highlights included a bathing Osprey which dove completely under the water at least seven times, each time surfacing to forcefully shake its body before circling to dive again. A local Peregrine Falcon appeared several times, hunting and displaying awesome flying maneuvers.

On the non-raptor side, there were four new Park species: White-winged Crossbill (Park species #259), which lingered in multiple numbers over the winter, a Cerulean Warbler (#260) on 27 April, and an Alder Flycatcher (#261) and a Nashville Warbler (#262) on 16 May. Additionally there was a huge blackbird flight on 27 February with approximately 5000 Red-winged Blackbirds and 6000 Common Grackles; 2 Surf Scoters on 21 March; 79 Horned Grebes on 29 March; about 5000 Tree Swallows on 1 April; a Virginia Rail on 20 April; Sandhill Cranes, 2 on 23 and 24 April and 1 on 11 May; and a Black Scoter on 31 May. The statewide May Count took place on 11 May and yielded besides the crane, a Black Tern, 1000+ Blue Jays, 13 warbler species, 181 Bobolinks and an impressive total of 102 species observed in the park or nearby. Lastly, Great Horned Owls nested in the Park, with two young seen repeatedly, and Warbling Vireos likely nested for the first time ever.

This season surely couldn't have been as productive without everyone who came to help compiler Sue Ricciardi, especially Hal Wierenga and Lynn Davidson, Nancy Magnusson, Ralph Geuder, Bob Rineer, Bill Hubick, Andy Smith, Mary Jane McMillan, Cal and Bud Orvis, Ranger Matt Grey, Dan Stewart, Dan Haas, Andy and Judy Higgs, Linda Baker, John Hoffman, Dave Grove, and Harry and Liz Armistead. The Park staff is owed many thanks for their continued and excellent support.

Every season is different, unpredictable, and manifests the spectacle of migration. What will happen next year? Reread the first sentence and get ready for the years to come.