

## Illinois Beach SP Hawkwatch Protocol

**Purpose:** To monitor numbers of raptor species migrating along the southwest shore of Lake Michigan. Raptors are here taken to mean members of: Order Falconiformes and Order Ciconiiformes, family Cathartidae

**Scope:** Migrating raptors of 15 species (see appendix) are to be counted between the end of August and the beginning of December, within the area bounded on the north by the Wisconsin-Illinois state line, on the south by Greenwood Avenue, on the west by Sheridan Road, and on the east by Lake Michigan (some raptors may migrate over the inshore water of the Lake. These will be included in the count.)

**Locations:** The main locale for counting is at the west pavilion in the north unit of Illinois Beach SP (i.e. Camp Logan). A secondary site is next to the volleyball courts at North Point Marina. In addition, reports of birds from the southern part of Illinois Beach SP will be recorded separately if, in the judgment of the counter for the day, they were not seen from the main site. (This will happen primarily with birds present early in the day, or with uncommon species.)

**Methods:** We will use volunteer counters to obtain data. Numerous volunteers have helped in the past, and we anticipate this trend continuing. Counting will take place on every day between the end of August and the beginning of December, weather and volunteer schedules permitting (Heavy rain and/or snow should not be counted in – we already know hawks don't fly in such weather). Counting will take place between the hours of 8AM and 5PM when possible, with occasional days with large flights necessitating later hours. (Counts undertaken in the latter part of November may end prior to 5 PM due to earlier sunsets.) It is important to note that we want every day covered, even if the winds are from the wrong direction or no hawks are being seen. "There were no hawks today" is a much different statement than "We didn't look for hawks today".

For any period counted, there is one official counter, usually the most experienced individual present. That person is responsible for the count, including numbers seen and identifications of individual birds seen. The counter may or may not choose to maintain the paperwork. If not, a second individual, the recorder, deals with the paperwork, with the understanding that if a dispute arises regarding numbers or ID, the counter for the period has the final say.

Data to be gathered include the number of each species of raptor counted, the percent cloud cover, the wind speed and direction, precipitation, an estimate of temperature, and the number of observers (volunteers, not visitors) for each hour. Raptor and observer numbers should be recorded on the hour, every hour. Weather data should be recorded on the half-hour, every hour. If starting in the second half of an hour, or ending in the first half, then weather data should be taken when starting or ending, such that weather data is recorded in every hour counted in. In addition, the number of minutes counted should be recorded for the previous hour (usually 60, but not necessarily). Starting and ending times for the days count should be recorded, as should the arrival and departure times of volunteers (as opposed to visitors). All data should be recorded according to Central Standard Time, even early in the season. If for some reason this is not done, it should be noted on the form that Daylight Savings Time was used.

Hawks are counted when they cross an imaginary line in the sky, running from directly west to directly east. Occasionally, birds will not be spotted until they have already passed behind the observers. If it is clear that they are migrants, and that they were not seen and counted in front of the observers, they can be included as well. Hawks that are traveling the wrong direction, that are seen repeatedly within a day or between days (primarily Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures), or are perched should not be counted. (Although perched birds are countable if they subsequently are seen moving south). Determining the migrating status of some individuals (especially Turkey Vultures) can be difficult – communication between volunteers for different days of the week is crucial for this. Communication is also important when two or more observers disagree about an ID – sometimes this is because they are looking at two different hawks!! In a case like this, a third observer can often note that they are looking in different directions. Otherwise, a running commentary on the flight path and other behavior can be quite helpful.

Spotting scopes should only be used for identification, and in the case of flocking species, counting of hawks. Scanning to detect hawks should only be done through binoculars. Given the expense and variable

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performance of scopes, there is no way to ensure any standardization between dates or observers if this provision is not followed.

Species of raptor observed, but not on the data sheet (e.g. the Ferruginous Hawk seen during the 2000 season) require careful descriptions of appearance, behavior, time seen, etc. Although our records are not subject to the decisions of the IORC, it is best to treat a rarity as if it will be. (Actually, any observers sighting a rare species are encouraged to submit the appropriate documentation to the IORC as well as including it in our records).

Volunteers are encouraged to record notable non-raptor species of in the comments at the bottom of the data form. Large migrants such as Sandhill Cranes and Tundra Swans, loons, and owls are examples of species that we regularly observe, but large movements of any other species are noteworthy (even insects – as an example, the large winged ant hatch observed in 2003). Perhaps such records will someday inspire someone to investigate those phenomena more fully.

At the end of the day, the counter or recorder should communicate the results to the site coordinator (at present, Vic Berardi). This can be done through e-mail (preferred, as there is a record that is easily kept) or telephone. Our data are maintained on the HMANA website, and are usually updated within a day of the observations.

Any use of data gathered here for publication should be accompanied by acknowledgement of the source (whether the HMANA website or directly from the coordinator) as well as an acknowledgement of the work of the volunteers who gathered it. Individual records (high counts, early or late dates) are encouraged to be sent in to the seasonal field note compilers for the IOS journal **Meadowlark**.

## Appendix

### Species of Raptors Observed during the IBSP hawkwatch

Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaeetus</i>
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperi</i>
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentiles</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>
Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>
Rough-legged Hawk	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>
Ferruginous Hawk (seen once)	<i>Buteo regalis</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>

In addition, the following species are possible:

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) has been seen in the area and season of the hawkwatch, but four years prior to its commencement

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) does occasionally occur in northern Illinois, but is likely to have departed the state entirely by the time that our season begins

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) is increasing

and extending its range northwards, however it shows a similar migration schedule to Mississippi Kite.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is likely to show up some years, as it is regularly sighted at large hawkwatches throughout the eastern US

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) has also been sighted in the park twice in the years prior to the beginning of the count.

Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) and

Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) are possible during the later part of the season, as both are occasionally seen in the state in the winter.



