

Sharing the Bonney Butte HawkWatch Raptor Project

HawkWatch International Final Report



Photo taken at the Bonney Butte HawkWatch by Mark Lundgren

Since our last update, we have finalized the numbers for the season. Over the 367 hours spent counting the 2023 fall migration season, HWI crew members recorded 2,220 migrating raptors. The number of birds counted was about 20% lower than the 10-year average but slightly higher than last year's count at 2,086. A total of 194 raptors of eight different species were banded and released. Funds from the foundation supported our incredible crew by covering their field site access stipend and providing crew appreciation, such as a raptor ID guide, neck gaiters, and a free meal.

When comparing this year's data to previous seasons, we saw below-average counts for most species at the site. This includes Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Goshawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, Osprey, and Prairie Falcon. Of these species, both the American Goshawk and Ferruginous Hawk appear on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Sensitive Species list, making their monitoring very important. According to the Raptor Population Index, half of the above species are also listed as species in decline across North America, meaning our data reinforces what is believed nationally about their health. Interestingly, the crew saw an above-average count for Osprey in 2022 and then below-average numbers in 2023. All other birds listed above saw below-average counts last year as well. The crew saw above-average numbers of Bald Eagle, Merlins, Peregrine Falcons, Swainson's Hawk, and Turkey Vulture. The above-average numbers of Swainson's Hawks are heartening, as this species is also currently on the Sensitive

Species list. Our findings also align with the Raptor Population Index, with three of the above species shown to be on the rise nationally.

If you are interested in seeing how the Bonney Butte HawkWatch numbers compare to the rest of the sites in our network, we are just wrapping up our migration network report covering the 2021-2023 seasons. Please send us an email if you would like to see the draft.

The Boulder Fire was the biggest challenge our team faced this season. In addition to creating smoky conditions that made it challenging to spot migrating raptors, the fire prompted the U.S. Forest Service to close the roads to the HawkWatch at the very beginning of our season through October 20th. With bad weather that took us off the mountain on the 23rd, this left only three days for visitors to access the site. The closure severely and unexpectedly limited our public education efforts this fall, with only eight visitors able to see our research. To make up for the lack of in-person visitation, the crew regularly posted photos and updates on our Friends of Bonney Butte HawkWatch page. We also posted two blogs highlighting the site, one introducing the Oregon crew and a mid-season update on the count. Finally, we posted our count daily on hawkcount.org.

The unexpected drop in visitation shows just how valuable it is for our team to invest in our digital resources. Our team continued to work on the Bonney Butte site video but faced challenges in wrapping up the project. The program director, who is fully remote from Idaho, planned to join us in person in June to collaborate on the new voice-over but sadly became sick with COVID-19. Due to the busy summer field season, we have been unable to reschedule. We aim to complete the video, have it up on our website, and share it with you by the end of the migration season this fall.

Thank you for your continued support of your work! If you have any questions, please reach out to me, Sammy Riccio, at sriccio@hawkwatch.org or to the project lead, Dave Oleyar, for specific questions on the science at doleyar@hawkwatch.org.