

Spring Raptor Migration Summary 2001

By Kyle McCarty and Keith L. Bildstein

Six watchsites reported counts for spring 2001 (Tables 1 and 2, pp 55-56). Count effort (hours of observation) for five sites ranged from 74 to 344 hours for a total of 1,136 hours (data not available for Tussey Mountain). Each of five sites that also reported counts in 2000 increased count effort by at least 25%, continuing an upward trend since 1998, and reflecting a rising interest in spring hawkwatching in Pennsylvania. Two watchsites, Allegheny Front and Rose Tree Park, registered more than 300 hours of counts.

A total of 12,454 raptors representing 17 species were reported. More than three-quarters of the total flight was seen and over half of the total hours were logged in April, when the peak of migration occurs. The passage rate for all species for five sites ranged from 2.9 to 7.3 raptors per hour (average 5.2), an average rate of two fewer raptors per hour than in 2000. A Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), the only one reported this year, was seen at Tussey Mountain, seven miles south of State College in central Pennsylvania.

Composition of the flight

Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*), which began to appear at watchsites in early April, and peaked by mid to late April, made up 43% of the overall flight (range of 11-55%), and were the most common raptors at four of the watchsites. At Allegheny Front and White Deer Ridge, Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) and Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*), respectively, were the most abundant migrants.

Red-tailed Hawks, which were seen migrating as early as February, made up the second largest part of the flight (14%). Turkey Vulture (10.4%), Sharp-shinned Hawk

(*Accipiter striatus*) (9.7%), and Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) (5.6%) were the only other species that made up more than 5% of the overall flight. These numbers are nearly identical compared with the composition of last year's flight.

Red-shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) and Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) were much more abundant in March than April. Three sites, Tussey Mountain, White Deer Ridge, and Allegheny Front, accounted for 260 of 262 (>99%) Golden Eagles, overall. Golden Eagles made up 2.5-5.1% of the flight at these sites, whereas they were far less common at Hawk Mountain, Rose Tree Park, and Tuscarora Summit, where they made up <0.5% of the flight.

Seasonal Highlights

Allegheny Front (Bedford County) – Observers at this site logged 344 hours, an increase of more than 100 hours from last spring. The total of seven Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) seen is more than any other site this year. This was the only site at which Red-tailed Hawks comprised the majority of the flight (>26%). Passage rates for all species were equal to or less than spring 2000 rates, leading to a decrease in total raptors seen despite expanded coverage.

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

(Berks County) – The total of 1,432 hawks, with 1,344 of them in April, represents the highest count for the last four years, when spring migration has been monitored exclusively at the site's North Lookout. For this same period, record season totals were set for 9 of the 14 species seen, and including daily high counts for Turkey Vulture (40), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) (2), Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) (20), Sharp-shinned Hawk (38), Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) (7), Broad-winged Hawk (242), Red-tailed Hawk (40), and American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) (25).

Rose Tree Park (Delaware County) – Observers at this watchsite in southeastern Pennsylvania logged 64 more hours than last year, and recorded nearly 300 more migrants. Passage rates of 7 of 15 species also increased, and the total rate of 7.3 birds per hour is among the highest of all sites reporting this year, as are the total counts of four species seen, including seven Northern Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) and 170 American Kestrels. The highest daily count of the season came on April 13 with 706 raptors counted, of which 551 were Broad-winged Hawks.

Table 1.
Watchsites reporting spring counts for 2001.

Watchsite	County	Hours of observation
Allegheny Front	Bedford	344
Rose Tree Park	Delaware	317
Hawk Mountain	Berks	290
White Deer Ridge	Lycoming	112
Tuscarora Summit	Fulton	74
Tussey Mountain	Centre	not available

Tuscarora Summit (Fulton County) – The spring migration count began at this site in the 1970s, and has averaged nearly 22 days of spring coverage since 1994. Passage rates for Osprey and Sharp-shinned Hawk both were the lowest in the past five years, but that for Cooper's Hawk was the second-highest over the last eight years. Broad-winged Hawks, Turkey Vultures, and Red-tailed Hawks accounted for >82% of the flight, the highest combined proportion for these three species among all sites.

Tussey Mountain (Centre County) – With near full-time coverage for the first time, this site had a banner year, setting count records for all species seen except Northern Goshawk, which tied the record. The site is along an important flyway for Golden Eagles (count=166) in spring. On April 12, observers counted 2,609 raptors of 16 species, including a Swainson's Hawk, the first ever seen at Tussey Mountain. Of the six watchsites that reported, Tussey Mountain recorded the highest counts in the state for 12 of 17 species, and the 10 Rough-legged Hawks (*Buteo lagopus*) was more than all other sites combined.

White Deer Ridge (Lycoming County) – In its second season, this watchsite added Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) (count=1), Rough-legged Hawk (3), and Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) (2) to its list of migrants. The total count of 33 Golden Eagles, with 11 on March 18, and the 112 hours of effort both are >30% increases over last year. The passage rate of 0.3 Golden per hour was equal between years. Passage rates for *Buteo* hawks (Red-shouldered, Broad-winged, and Red-tailed), American Kestrel, and Sharp-shinned Hawk all were 26-70% below the first season's, while that for Northern Harrier increased 15%.

Acknowledgments: We thank the compilers who reported their counts for the spring 2001 season, and all of the watchsite participants who

helped the compilers document the migration. ♣

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Mississippi Kite Sightings

There were a number of Mississippi Kite sightings this quarter. The Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee considers Mississippi Kites to be a casual visitor to the state and requests documentation for any sightings. Below are excerpts from descriptions submitted for a few of this quarter's sightings.

Date: May 24, 2001

Location: Blue Marsh Gamelands, Berks

Observer: Katrina Knight

Weather Conditions: Warm, no precipitation, some clouds but not heavy cloud-cover, light breeze.

Description: I first spotted this bird sitting perched at the top of a tree from a distance. My initial impression was of a medium-sized dark raptor with a white head. The bird was obviously not the right shape for an accipiter - the tail was too short and the body shape just didn't quite fit; and it seemed too small for a Red-tail, as well as having a white head. It was too big and had the wrong markings for a kestrel. The dark chest and the small size ruled out Osprey. It was obviously too small and not bulky enough for an eagle. The white head and general shape and size seemed wrong for a harrier. That eliminated the raptors I commonly see in that area. It did not seem to have the right coloration for any other *buteo* either. I slowly approached it. As I was approaching, it appeared that the bird had a forked tail. Eventually, I got to within a 100 feet or so, where I could see that what I had initially thought was the tail was actually long, pointy wings whose tips went past the end of the tail. By this point it was also obvious that the bird had a gray back and chest with a darker tail. The bill also appeared relatively small for a raptor. At this point I had no doubt that this bird was a Mississippi Kite, which I have seen and observed at length on multiple occasions in Florida. I watched the perched bird

for at least 15 minutes before it took off and slowly circled around overhead, gradually getting higher and then flying off toward the lake and out of sight. In flight, the bird appeared pointy-winged and somewhat like a falcon in shape, but with a slightly notched tail, and its flight was graceful without much flapping once it was away from the perch, very unlike a falcon's more powerful flight. At the time the bird flew off, I was attempting to use my cell phone to call some other local birders over to see it, so my views of it in flight were mostly naked-eye rather than with my binoculars. I could not see any stripes in the tail, which should make the bird an adult. I could see some white in the wings on the upper side when it turned, but I mainly saw it from below and am not completely sure whether it had the white secondaries of a full adult or just spots where new feathers were coming in on a sub-adult. The bird was definitely not an immature, being gray, not brown on the back and plain gray, not streaked on the breast. I believe the bird was a male, due to the very light color of the head. ♣

Date: May 30, 2001, 4:30PM

Location: Lake Nockamixon State Park, Haycock Township, Bucks

Observer: Bill Etter

Weather Conditions: Bright skies, moderate wind

Description: A raptor that I at first mistook for a Sharp-shinned Hawk flew out from above the treetops and circled overhead. The proportions of the wings were more slender and pointier than any resident accipiter or *buteo*. Its size was clearly larger than that of any expected falcon. It seemed very bouncy. As the bird circled, I had a good look at its banded tail, faintly streaked gray breast and underwing pattern. The underwing was generally dark, accentuated by noticeably light patches below the secondaries, at the 'wrist'. The bird appeared to be missing a few primary feathers, especially on its right wing. It continued to fly back and forth over the woods and hillside, made a grab at something in midair, then turned and flew northeast. From my hilltop vantage, I was able to pick it up in the scope at this point, watching it until it dipped below a distant treeline a minute or two later. ♣

Table 2. PENNSYLVANIA SPRING HAWK MIGRATION SUMMARIES

ALLEGHENY FRONT (Bedford) 2001
Angelo Mincone, compiler

Month	Days	Hours	BLVU	TUVU	OSPR	BAEA	NOHA	SSHA	COHA	NOGO	RSHA	BWHA	RTHA	RLHA	GOEA	AMKE	MERL	PEFA	Unid	Total
February	14	72.3	0	11	0	2	2	1	3	1	13	0	34	0	4	0	0	0	3	74
March	19	104.8	0	187	0	4	8	24	13	1	19	0	100	0	41	5	1	1	22	426
April	21	138.8	1	65	34	7	12	82	25	1	10	126	173	0	16	8	3	4	25	592
May	5	28.3	0	0	57	4	1	16	1	0	0	7	7	0	0	0	0	2	0	95
Total	59	344	1	263	91	17	23	123	42	3	42	133	314	0	61	13	4	7	50	1187
Total per hr			0.00	0.76	0.26	0.05	0.07	0.36	0.12	0.01	0.12	0.39	0.91	0.00	0.18	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.15	3.45
% of flight			0.1	22.2	7.7	1.4	1.9	10.4	3.5	0.3	3.5	11.2	26.5	0.0	5.1	1.1	0.3	0.6	4.2	100.0

HAWK MOUNTAIN SANCTUARY (Berks) 2001
Laurie Goodrich, compiler

Month	Days	Hours	BLVU	TUVU	OSPR	BAEA	NOHA	SSHA	COHA	NOGO	RSHA	BWHA	RTHA	RLHA	GOEA	AMKE	MERL	PEFA	Unid	Total
March	5	22.7	0	1	0	1	1	7	6	0	3	0	14	0	0	4	1	0	3	41
April	27	178.3	2	73	134	5	38	181	22	0	14	463	126	0	0	83	6	1	196	1344
May	14	88.9	2	0	16	1	3	2	2	0	0	12	4	0	0	2	2	0	1	47
Total	46	289.9	4	74	150	7	42	190	30	0	17	475	144	0	0	89	9	1	200	1432
Total per hr			0.01	0.26	0.52	0.02	0.14	0.66	0.10	0.00	0.06	1.64	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.31	0.03	0.00	0.89	4.94
% of flight			0.3	5.2	10.5	0.5	2.9	13.3	2.1	0.0	1.2	33.2	10.1	0.0	0.0	6.2	0.6	0.1	14.0	100.0

ROSE TREE PARK (Delaware) 2001
Jim Lockyer, compiler

Month	Days	Hours	BLVU	TUVU	OSPR	BAEA	NOHA	SSHA	COHA	NOGO	RSHA	BWHA	RTHA	RLHA	GOEA	AMKE	MERL	PEFA	Unid	Total
March	17	107.8	32	142	17	6	14	43	22	2	24	0	110	0	0	27	1	1	40	481
April	28	208.8	11	211	119	8	34	181	34	5	15	941	60	0	1	143	8	2	52	1826
Total	45	316.5	43	353	136	14	48	224	56	7	39	941	170	0	1	170	9	3	92	2306
Total per hr			0.14	1.12	0.43	0.04	0.15	0.71	0.18	0.02	0.12	2.97	0.54	0.00	0.00	0.54	0.03	0.01	0.29	7.29
% of flight			1.9	15.3	5.9	0.6	2.1	9.7	2.4	0.3	1.7	40.8	7.4	0.0	0.0	7.4	0.4	0.1	4.0	100.0

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TUSCARORA SUMMIT (Fulton) 2001
John Taylor, compiler

Month	Days	Hours	BLVU	TUVU	OSPR	BAEA	NOHA	SSHA	COHA	NOGO	RSHA	BWHA	RTHA	RLHA	GOEA	AMKE	MERL	PEFA	Unid	Total
March	6	23.3	0	17	1	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	10	0	0	1	0	0	0	35
April	12	50.8	4	29	12	0	4	4	3	0	0	99	20	0	1	2	0	0	0	176
Total	18	74	4	46	13	0	4	4	7	2	0	99	30	0	1	3	0	0	0	213
Total per hr			0.05	0.62	0.18	0.00	0.05	0.05	0.09	0.03	0.00	1.34	0.41	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.88
% of flight			1.9	21.6	6.1	0.0	1.9	1.9	3.3	0.9	0.0	46.5	14.1	0.0	0.5	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0

TUSSEY MOUNTAIN (Centre) 2001
Dan Ombalski, compiler

Month	Days	Hours	BLVU	TUVU	OSPR	BAEA	NOHA	SSHA	COHA	NOGO	RSHA	BWHA	RTHA	RLHA	GOEA	AMKE	MERL	PEFA	Unid	Total*
February	5	n.a.**	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	1	14
March	31	n.a.	7	172	3	13	15	32	25	1	46	0	140	5	109	23	0	0	2	593
April	25	n.a.	27	92	247	11	109	590	146	3	8	3587	820	5	52	144	16	4	20	5882
May	4	n.a.	0	0	22	0	1	6	0	0	0	12	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	45
Total	65	n.a.	38	265	272	24	125	628	172	5	54	3599	963	10	166	167	16	5	24	6534
Total per hr			n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
% of flight			0.6	4.1	4.2	0.4	1.9	9.6	2.6	0.1	0.8	55.1	14.7	0.2	2.5	2.6	0.2	0.1	0.4	100.0

WHITE DEER RIDGE (Lycoming) 2001
Joe Yoder, compiler

Month	Days	Hours	BLVU	TUVU	OSPR	BAEA	NOHA	SSHA	COHA	NOGO	RSHA	BWHA	RTHA	RLHA	GOEA	AMKE	MERL	PEFA	Unid	Total
February	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
March	14	64.5	1	154	0	1	9	14	4	1	17	0	98	3	27	9	1	0	20	359
April	9	42.5	0	138	30	2	18	28	11	0	0	115	54	0	6	9	1	0	9	422
Total	24	112	1	292	30	3	27	43	15	1	17	115	153	3	33	18	2	0	29	782
Total per hr			0.01	2.61	0.27	0.03	0.24	0.38	0.13	0.01	0.15	1.03	1.37	0.03	0.29	0.16	0.02	0.00	0.26	6.98
% of flight			0.1	37.3	3.8	0.4	3.5	5.5	1.9	0.1	2.2	14.7	19.6	0.4	4.2	2.3	0.3	0.0	3.7	100.0

TOTAL FOR ALL WATCHSITES 2001

Month	Days	Hours*	BLVU	TUVU	OSPR	BAEA	NOHA	SSHA	COHA	NOGO	RSHA	BWHA	RTHA	RLHA	GOEA	AMKE	MERL	PEFA	Unid	Total**
February	20	77.3	4	12	0	2	2	1	4	2	13	0	36	0	9	0	0	0	4	89
March	92	323.0	40	673	21	25	47	120	74	7	109	0	472	8	177	69	4	2	87	1,935
April	122	619.1	45	608	576	33	215	1,067	241	9	47	5,331	1,253	5	76	389	34	11	302	10,243
May	23	117.2	2	0	95	5	5	24	3	0	0	31	13	0	0	2	2	3	2	187
Total	196	1136.4	91	1,293	692	65	269	1,212	322	18	169	5,362	1,774	13	262	460	40	16	395	12,454
Total per hr			0.05	0.90	0.37	0.04	0.13	0.51	0.13	0.01	0.10	1.55	0.71	0.00	0.08	0.26	0.02	0.01	0.33	5.21
% of flight			0.7	10.4	5.6	0.5	2.2	9.7	2.6	0.1	1.4	43.1	14.2	0.1	2.1	3.7	0.3	0.1	3.2	100.0

* Note: Hours and Total per hour do not include Tussey Mountain.
**Total includes one Swainson's Hawk.

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