

Summary of Raptor Banding Efforts at Hitchcock Nature Center-Fall 2014

This past banding/HawkWatch season has been by far the most unusual and frustrating season since inception. Weather systems played a negative major role determining achieving objectives. Banding diurnal raptors commenced on September 7th on schedule. The month of September was typical as far as capture rates and weather systems, although we were stymied somewhat by the lack of availability of starlings for lure birds. House sparrows proved a nearly adequate substitute.

During the peak period of October, weather systems that drive diurnal raptor migration worked against monitoring efforts by forcing migration on a broad front rather than concentrating migrants on the Loess Hills ridges where we monitor. As a result, Diurnal raptor numbers were off by about 25% of typical banding seasons. Species diversity of banded birds was perhaps the most disheartening aspect of the diurnal season. Only one lone American kestrel was banded beside the typical three species that make up the bulk of our efforts, red tail, sharp-shin, and cooper's hawks. The one bright spot was the ratio of juvenile to adult redtails banded. After a nearly 50-50 ratio of juvenile to adults in 2013, the ratio was more typical in 2014 of a successful breeding season. It approached an 80-20 ratio of juveniles to adults. Saw whet owl banding commenced October 10th and was strong from onset considering that the 2013 season was at the bottom of their population cycle. The weather systems that disrupted the diurnal banding operations were advantageous for saw whet banding. By the end of October, 23 new saw whet owls were banded at Hitchcock. Three other saw whets were also captured that had been previously banded. One came from Hawkridge at Duluth that had been banded only eight days before. If the owl had traveled in a straight line it would have averaged 51.2 miles per night, a new record flight for our saw whet recaptures. The second recapture came from Roosevelt National Forest in western North Dakota, our first recapture from a site west of our station. The third recapture was banded last year by our friends at Missouri River Bird Observatory which was only one of thirteen banded by them that season at Marshall MO.

November began much like October's weather, warm and mild with just a trickle of diurnal raptor movement. By the 10th it had changed rapidly into winter weather more typical of January. Despite five attempts during the rest of November, no further banding occurred. The wintery weather had a similar effect on saw whet banding. The saw whet banding season peaks during the first week of November. By the end of the third week, their migration is over. During the period November 1-9, thirteen more saw whets were banded at HNC. Our largest objective this saw whet season was to commence on November 9th. Sandy Reinken was to continue banding owls at HNC while I was to spend 3 nights banding saw whets at Waubonsie State Park 50 miles south of HNC in the Loess Hills. Our objective was to recapture saw whets banded at HNC this season to demonstrate that the Loess Hills are used by the owls as a migration corridor. We were unable to carry out that plan due to the persistent unseasonably cold weather. When the winter weather hit on the 10th, Conditions were unsafe or considered unproductive to band and no further banding occurred until November 20th when the last attempt and the last saw whet of the season was banded. All told, 36 new owls were banded with 3 foreign recaptures totaling 39. This tally is consistent with what may be expected the first year after the low year in the population recovery cycle especially considering losing two weeks of prime banding time to weather conditions.

Veronica Mecko's saw whet banding efforts in southern Iowa were divided between two sites. She continued her efforts at Mount Ayr Wildlife Management Area in Ringgold County by spending four nights which produced four saw whet captures. Her second site was south of Lamoni on private property in Harrison County just over the Missouri border. She banded six owls in six nights at that location. Her efforts were hampered by conflicts in her schedule prohibiting her from starting earlier and having the opportunity to band more frequently. She was also hampered by larger owls in close proximity to her mist nets which forced her to close her nets prematurely or not open them on some nights due to fear of predation.

RAPTORS BANDED AT HNC 2008-2014

species	2014	total 2008-14	avg. 2008-14
redtail hawk	82	643	91.85
cooper	9	122	17.43
sharp-shin	25	207	29.57
peregrine	0	7	1
merlin	0	8	1.14
american kestrel	1	4	0.57
Prairie Falcon	0	2	0.29
broadwing	0	3	0.43
Red-shouldered Hawk	0	2	0.29
Swainson's	0	1	0.14
goshawk	0	2	0.29
Northern Harrier	0	1	0.14
N. Saw Whet Owl	38	306	51
E. Screech Owl	0	1	0.14
TOTAL	155	1309	194.28