

Hitchcock Nature Center Hawk Watch and Banding, Fall 2009

Mark Orsag

SEASON IN SUMMARY—THE YEAR THAT BROKE THE MOLD

After a terribly slow start to the 2009 season in August and September, the fall hawk flight resurrected itself with the 2nd strongest October on record at Hitchcock Nature Center (HNC) hawk watch, followed by the 3rd strongest November and the 2nd strongest December. The overall season total of 10,638 birds (of seventeen different species) logged is just 5% below average. For most of the season, we expected much, much worse. The massive (1,340) late flight of 23 October saved the season and broke the Hitchcock mode of the fall flight annually peaking between 20 September and 20 October. Overall, 13 species posted below average totals and seven above average totals. Season records were set for Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and Merlin. New day marks were set for Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and Merlin.

Other trends apparent in 2009 did, however, carry-over from past seasons. Western species tended to, as they have the past several seasons, trend downward. Accipters showed strongly again in 2009, while Merlin numbers continued to explode. American Kestrel numbers continued strongly to reflect a national pattern of decline. The banding station, under Jerry Toll's able guidance, enjoyed a banner year for both diurnal raptors and Saw-whet Owls. Hitchcock Nature Center indeed logged a record six owl species (Barred, Eastern Screech, Great-horned, Long-eared, Saw-whet, and Short-eared) during the hawk watch!

THE SEASON IN DETAIL

August and September

August started the season out in a somewhat odd manner (a sign of things to come in 2009). Seven days of part-time counting brought only a paltry 94 raptors (with 54 of the birds counted being immature Turkey Vultures). A total of eleven species were recorded, however, making August 2009 a surprisingly diverse month. Continual weak cold fronts probably led to fairly broad-front early movement (thus the low overall numbers) but did trigger a few unusually early departures (such as the Merlin seen on 20 August). The lack of south winds also probably kept young Turkey Vultures from staging and tacking their way south using the Loess Hills.

Full-time counting began as usual on September 1, and HNC hawk watch counter Ryan Evans, along with his faithful canine, Dog, reported for duty. A relentless pattern of southeasterly and easterly winds set in with the new month and dominated its first ten days. These are not favorable wind directions at Hitchcock as they create only weak up-drafts as the steep face of the Loess Hills is on its west side. Thus, Turkey Vulture movement was particularly slow and not much else was flying either. Ryan and Mark Orsag (along

with his Welsh Terrier, Griffin) experienced a decent raptor and nonraptor push on 6 September with a flight of 521 Red-headed Woodpeckers being the day's highlight. A total of 53 young Turkey Vultures dominated the raptor flight of 66 birds with an early Swainson's Hawk as the highlight.

The pattern of easterlies and south-easterlies continued through the middle part of the month with only a couple of weak cold fronts and low pressure systems moving through and pushing the winds out of the northeast. The flight remained excruciatingly slow and many hawk watchers began to sense a bad season ahead. Perhaps the most notable day of this period occurred on 16 September when Ryan took the tower with only Dog for company. A weak cold front with northeast winds produced an 85 raptor flight that included ten species. Red-tailed (21) and Broad-winged (22) hawks dominated with three Merlins being the day's highlights. During the last ten days of September that traditionally begin the "prime time" period at Hitchcock, the weather pattern finally broke a bit and the raptors began to flow past the tower. However, the volume was low compared to how this period usually plays out, and there were several very poor days. Triple digit flights occurred on 25 (144) and 29 (113) September; totals exceeding 200 southbound raptors were posted on 23 (237), 26 (274), and 28 (280) September. The outstanding day of the month occurred on 27 September; Ryan Evans, Mark Orsag, and Jim Sinclair counted a whopping 417 raptors of 11 species. A moderately strong Pacific cold front passed Hitchcock around 11 A.M. with the day's most intense movement taking place just before the frontal boundary passed through. Broad-winged Hawks (191) and Turkey Vultures (114) were the dominant species on the day. Still, despite a few good days at the end of the month, September 2009 had been, by far, the worst September ever at HNC hawk watch with fewer than 2,500 migrant raptors recorded.

October

Despite the lack, for the third year in a row, of a strong push of Swainson's Hawks, the flight began to gather momentum in early October and only one day out of the first ten days of the month failed to see a triple-digit flight. Turkey Vultures had finally begun to move in numbers and were joined by an early push of Red-tailed Hawks. A strong two-day push of more than 900 birds on 7 and 8 October proved to be the highlight of early October. On 7 October, Ryan Evans and Jason McMeen counted an updraft-powered (strong southwest winds) 12 species, 307 bird flight that was dominated by Turkey Vultures (244). The winds turned to the north the next day for Ryan and Clem Klaphake, temperatures dropped, and a mass of Turkey Vultures (332) and Red-tailed Hawks (176) pushed though accompanied by eight other raptor species including a lone Golden Eagle. The daily total was 604 birds.

A baffling and shifting weather pattern (including an early snow storm) during the middle of October brought mostly disappointing totals. Most flights were only double-digit affairs and the only two days over 200 birds occurred on 19 and 20 October at the very end of the traditional "prime time" period. Mark Orsag and Ryan Evans logged a ten species 259 bird flight on southerly winds on 19 October that was dominated by Sharp-shinned (115) and Red-tailed (87) hawks. The day also featured two outstanding birds—a Red-shouldered Hawk and a Black-billed Magpie. On 20 October (a cloudy day with light

southeast winds that initially looked none too promising), Ryan, Fritz Davis, and Linda Dennis took the tower and were surprised with a HNC hawk watch day-record flight of Sharp-shinned Hawks (237) in a flight of 288 raptors that also included four Merlins. “Prime-time” was now over, and while there appeared to be a strong late Sharp-shinned Hawk push, the main topic of discussion amongst HNC hawk watchers was trying to estimate just how awful our season totals were going to be with some believing that we might not even record 8,500 raptors for the season.

The next two days included a rain-out and a paltry 36 bird day. Then came “the day that saved the season.” On 23 October, Ryan Evans, Jason McMeen, Elliott Bedows, and Fritz Davis logged time on the tower. Northwest winds were blowing after the passage of a strong “Alberta Clipper” cold front. The morning saw rain, although this didn’t deter the Northern Harriers and Sharp-shinned Hawks. Right away, the experienced watchers on the tower had a clue that something extraordinary might be about to happen. The rain stopped at 10 A.M. and later in the day the sun broke through. The birds, riding high on the strong updrafts, soared in massive mixed groups and shot high over the tower in dizzying fast glides. American Crows poured by in twisting snake-like flocks. The migrants kept coming in waves with the counters straining to keep up. In the end 1,340 raptors of eleven species were counted along with 8,695 American Crows, one Great Blue Heron, 17 Double-crested Cormorants, and 50 Snow Geese. New day records had been set for Northern Harrier (138), Red-tailed Hawk (933), and Merlin (19); four Northern Goshawks had also been recorded. The flight had been extraordinary also in how late it had been; for the first time ever at HNC hawk watch, the fall raptor flight had peaked outside of the 20 September—20 October window. The final week of October saw three more strong days—on 25 October (379), 26 October (194), and 31 October (236). Red-tailed Hawks dominated all of these flights. The strong flight on Halloween continued an amazing tradition (stretching back as far as anyone can remember) of good luck on that day at HNC.

November and December

November started out with fairly moderate temperatures. By the middle of the month, however, the weather had cooled considerably as a series of cold fronts moved through in rapid-fire fashion. On the nonfront days, winds tended to be out of the southeast. As this pattern gave migrant raptors little chance to stage in the hills and probably pushed them through on a fairly broad front, most flights in the first half of November were quite modest. Notable flights did occur, however, on 1, 2, and 9 November. With a visiting group from Wachiska Audubon helping Mark Orsag and Sandy Reinken on the tower on 1 November, a nine species-159 bird flight took place. The day was dominated by Red-tailed Hawks (97), but featured a late Turkey Vulture, two Rough-legged Hawks, a Red-shouldered Hawk, and an immature Northern Goshawk trapped at the banding station by Carla Alschwede and Jerry Toll. A moderately strong cold front pushed through the next day bringing another nine species flight. The flight on 2 November was larger, however, with a total of 311 raptors (Red-tailed Hawks totaled 273) for Ryan Evans and Jason McMeen. Two Northern Goshawks were the highlights that day. On 9 November, with Ryan on the tower alone, a Pacific cold front brought a nine species 120 raptor flight dominated by Red-tailed Hawks (79) and Bald Eagles (25). Highlights included three Rough-legged

Hawks, two Golden Eagles, and a lone Northern Goshawk (if there had been a partridge in a pear tree, it surely would have been eaten!).

The second half of November was cloudy and cold, and whether the winds blew from the north or southeast seemed to matter little. There were few really strong fronts or good thermalling days, and the late-season raptors still north of the watch in late November are apparently a hardy lot, willing to endure the deepening cold and wait for the perfect day. On 16 November there was a six species 113 raptor flight dominated by Red-tailed Hawks (75) and Bald Eagles (34) for counter Ryan Evans. A somewhat stronger cold front blew through on 25 November sparking a seven species 143 raptor flight and a strong push of non-raptor migrants for counters Ryan Evans, Jerry Toll (whose duties leading the banding project had concluded for 2009) and Jason McMeen. Red-tailed Hawks (75) and Bald Eagles (59) dominated, but the flight also included a Golden Eagle and a Red-shouldered Hawk. Snow Geese (3,450) were accompanied by Ross's Geese (36), Ring-billed Gulls (59), and American Crows (95).

The slow pattern of late November carried on into December as the season ground to a close. Two similarly powerful Arctic fronts just five days apart did their part to freeze hawk watchers and bring lots of birds for the two last times in 2009. On 9 December, Jerry Toll and Ryan Evans endured a combination of -15.8 Celsius temperatures and howling northwest winds to count a five species 143 raptor flight that included 123 Bald Eagles, 4 Rough-legged Hawks, and one Golden Eagle. On 14 December, a four species 136 raptor flight was noted by Ryan with 129 Bald Eagles accompanied by one Rough-legged Hawk.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Black Vulture (0). This species, which turned up at the HNC hawk watch in September of 2002 and August of 2005, again failed to make an appearance in 2009. The Black Vulture seems to be a very irregular early season vagrant at the hawk watch.

Turkey Vulture (2,668). Steady easterly winds early in the season might have pushed many of these birds into Nebraska. Turkey Vultures love to tack and use updrafts as they drift lazily south. Conditions at HNC hawk watch (with the near absence of westerly and particularly southwesterly winds early in the season) were thus far from ideal for a big flight for this species in 2009. The 2009 season total was 13% below the HNC hawk watch average; interestingly, the 2008 total had been 13% above average. The 2009 peak flight of 332 occurred with normal timing on 8 October. The last bird was seen on 12 November.

Osprey (100). Another early-season updraft and south-wind favoring "tacker," the Osprey, like the Turkey Vulture, showed up in below average numbers at the HNC hawk watch in 2009. The 2009 season total of 100 Ospreys was 14% below the HNC hawk watch average (the 2008 total had been 12% above average). Flight timing was in all ways normal. As usual, the HNC hawk watch Osprey flight was strongly concentrated in September, with the peak flight of 22 taking place on 25 September (one of the few early season days featuring southwesterly winds). The first two Ospreys were recorded on 20 August with the last being recorded on 19 October.

Bald Eagle (854). The Bald Eagle flight for 2009 was 5% above average for the HNC hawk watch. December was the top month and that month saw two very big Bald Eagle flights—123 birds on 9 December and a season-high 129 individuals

on 14 December. Both of those flights occurred on frigid days, following the passage of strong cold fronts overnight, with blustery northwest winds the following day. As has become usual in recent years, a few eagles moved at the front end of the season with the first southbound bird (an adult) recorded on 20 August. Despite this year's rebound, the Bald Eagle has posted a fairly clear pattern of decline at the HNC hawk watch. We believe, however, that this almost certainly reflects a flight path shift (possibly related to shifting Snow Goose migration patterns) rather than a decline or other change in Bald Eagle populations distributed north of HNC.

Northern Harrier (384). This species posted very big numbers at the HNC hawk watch in 2009 after two very poor seasons. The 2009 total of 384 Northern Harriers was a new HNC hawk watch season record and fully 25% above average (interestingly, once again 2008's flight had been 25% below average). Flight timing was normal with October being the top month. The peak flight of 138 on 23 October was a new day record and obliterated the old (thrice-reached) mark of 49. The first two southbound harriers were counted on 28 August. The last harrier was recorded on 20 December (the last day of the 2009 hawk watch). This species seems to post widely fluctuating totals from season to season. There seems, however, to be no easily discernible pattern to, or explanation for, these variations. Perhaps due to their extreme adaptability in terms of migratory conditions (wind, weather, sunlight) harrier migration behavior at HNC hawk watch is still not well understood.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (1,273). All of the accipters posted very strong totals in 2009 and Sharp-shinned Hawks moved through in abundance this season, setting

new seasonal and day records and posting three triple digit days. Flight timing was a bit late and October (966) was overwhelmingly the top month for sharp-shinned after a very slow start to the flight in September. This was a more extreme version of a pattern we've seen previously at Hitchcock. The new day record of 237 was set on 20 October, a cloudy day with light to moderate southeast winds. The first Sharp-shinned Hawk was spotted on 29 August, and the 2009 seasonal total was a whopping 22% above average.

Cooper's Hawk (277). This total was yet another season record, although the season daily high count of 31 birds on 23 October did not constitute a new day record for the HNC hawk watch. The season total was a solid 19% above average, and the Cooper's Hawk has shown a clear positive trend at the HNC hawk watch that probably indicates population increases and possible range expansion to the north of HNC. The last southbound bird moved through on 28 November, but at least one Cooper's Hawk appeared to be wintering at the nature center.

Northern Goshawk (11). The roughly decade-long migratory cycle of the Northern Goshawk is relatively well-understood, even by hawk watchers without advanced degrees in raptor biology. Thus, we have been anticipating a major goshawk uptick to come between 2009 and 2011. While this year certainly seemed to fill the bill, it still didn't match the remarkable day (6) and season (18) records dating from the last peak year at the HNC hawk watch, the partial coverage 2000 season. In 2009, the first goshawk was recorded on 16 October and the last on 6 December. The 2009 daily season high of 4 came on 23 October. The season total was 57% above the seven-year full-coverage HNC hawk watch average.

Red-shouldered Hawk (3). The 2009 season total, which matched the 2008 season total, was 40% below average. The Red-shouldered Hawk has demonstrated a clear pattern of decline at the HNC hawk watch, but this species is simply too rare to venture any solid conclusions about its population or range distribution status. The first bird was seen on 19 October and the last on 25 October; there were no multiple bird days. Flight timing has varied a bit over the years, but nothing about this season's flight seemed out of the ordinary.

Broad-winged Hawk (495). The Broad-winged Hawk 2009 season total of 495 birds was 24% below average. This apparently reflected both the overall poor nature of the early season flight and, apparently, a dearth of migrants from western Canada. For the first time ever at the HNC hawk watch, we recorded no dark morph broad-wingeds. These birds were surely pushed west of us by the relentless easterly winds early in the season. Despite these trends, flight timing wasn't terribly abnormal. The first bird was recorded on 22 August; the last sailed past on 7 October. The peak flight of 191 on 27 September was, however, just a bit late. September (479) was, as always, the top month.

Swainson's Hawk (248). Once again, as has been the case now for three straight seasons, there was a very feeble flight of Swainson's Hawks past the HNC hawk watch in 2009. Flight timing, however, was normal with the first bird seen on 6 September. The last Swainson's Hawk was recorded on 14 October and the peak flight of 53 occurred just a bit early on 28 September (though within their traditional ten-day window). One rufous morph and one dark morph Swainson's Hawks were recorded. The season total of 248 was 80% below the HNC hawk watch average. The

times when Swainson's Hawks annually posted 1,000 bird days at the HNC hawk watch in late September or early October seem long gone now. This species shows a sharp and demonstrable pattern of decline at HNC. There are many possible explanations: population decline due to drought in the western United States and Canada, easterly winds (certainly prevalent in 2009) pushing migrants into Nebraska, or maybe we are just geographically on the margin of their possible flight path and big flights of this species at the HNC hawk watch will always be cyclic or hit and miss. Only time will tell, but we really miss these graceful birds.

Red-tailed Hawk (4,039). The Red-tailed Hawk flight in fall 2009 at the HNC hawk watch was a memorable one. The season total was fully 17% above average, and a new day record for Red-tailed Hawks (933) was set on 23 October. This remains one of our most abundant and reliable species. Population trends appear stable for the seven years of data that we have collected. As always, the red-taileds passing over HNC were a very diverse lot and included both of the main Western and Eastern subspecies and a wide variety of other more geographically specific subspecies and color morphs: Harlan's dark morph (37), Harlan's light morph (4), Western dark morph (32), Western rufous morph (3), Krider's (12), and indeterminate dark morph (24).

Rough-legged Hawk (31). The 2009 rough-legged flight at the HNC hawk watch logged in a bit late and a bit on the small side. The season total was 6% below the HNC hawk watch average. The first two rough-leggeds were not recorded until 1 November (about a week late) and December (17) was the peak month. The twin peak flights (4) occurred on 6 and 9 December. The relatively high percentage

(26%) of dark morphs (8) in the 2009 flight suggests a more eastern flavor to the rough-leggeds passing HNC hawk watch in 2009 than is usually the case. A cyclic pattern to rough-legged migration at the HNC hawk watch appears to be beginning to emerge from our data, but it is still too uncertain. Hopefully, the next several years of data will bring more clarity to the situation.

Ferruginous Hawk (0). Going into 2008, we'd had a remarkable run of 1- and 2-bird seasons with these magnificent buteos at the HNC hawk watch, but they are casual or accidental rarities in Iowa, and even at the location in the state annually most likely to produce a sighting, our luck had to run out eventually. During the last two seasons, this much anticipated rarity has failed to make an appearance. Like a number of other western species, it shows a pattern of decline at the HNC hawk watch, though our numbers are too small to draw any real conclusions about the population health and distribution of this species.

Golden Eagle (17). The Golden Eagle has established a clear, but still somewhat mystifying, migratory pattern at the HNC hawk watch. The first bird appears either in late September or early October. November is usually the peak month. The last bird passes by in early or mid-December. The flight is widely spaced without major peaks (day counts rarely top two birds). The season totals also (with two exceptions) don't tend to vary wildly from year to year. The 2009 Golden Eagle flight fit this pattern exactly in every way but one. November (7) was the peak month. The flight produced no single peak but rather three 2-bird days spread out between October and November. The last bird passed by on 15 December. The season total was only 6% below the HNC hawk watch average. The one difference this season was

a record early (for the HNC hawk watch) Golden Eagle on 12 September, about two to three weeks early.

American Kestrel (92). The decline of the American Kestrel has become particularly apparent at the HNC hawk watch over the last two seasons. While the 2009 total rebounded ever so slightly from the rock bottom reached in 2008, the 2009 season total was still a whopping 22% below the seven-year full coverage HNC hawk watch average (and that average excludes the partial coverage years prior to 2003 which often saw much higher kestrel totals despite only part-time coverage). The 2009 flight was late and weak. The flight peaked with 13 birds on 28 September, but October was the peak month.

Merlin (87). In 2009, the ongoing explosion of Merlin numbers at the HNC hawk watch found yet another level. New season and day (19 Merlins on 23 October) records were established. The Merlin flight at the HNC hawk watch now regularly spans the season. The first Merlin was counted on 20 August, and the last southbound bird logged on 18 December. October, as usual, was the top month. As usual, both *columbarius* and *richardsonii* individuals were recorded in 2009. The 2009 season total for Merlins was an amazing 112% above average. If current trends continue, the Merlin will soon be the common (default) small falcon at Hitchcock and the American Kestrel the uncommon small falcon.

Peregrine Falcon (35). After three strong seasons, Peregrine Falcons were much less in evidence at the HNC hawk watch this year with the 2009 season total logging in 10% below average. October was, as usual, the top month. The shallow peak flight of six occurred with normal timing on 1 October. The first Peregrine Falcon was counted on 28 August and the

last a bit early on 23 October. As usual, both *tundrius* and *anatum* birds were recorded this year.

Prairie Falcon (1). The 2009 season was a bad year all around for western raptors at the HNC hawk watch. Only one Prairie Falcon was recorded this year, an adult bird on 24 October. This is 75% below the HNC hawk watch average. The Prairie Falcon exhibits a clear pattern of

decline at Hitchcock. Once again, the number of Prairie Falcons seen at HNC is simply too small to draw any reliable conclusions about population trends.

Mississippi Kite (0). Given that it was, on the whole, a cool wet summer in the center of the United States in 2009, we weren't anticipating a good flight of these northward dispersing early season raptors. We were really, really right.

NONRAPTOR FLIGHT

Waterfowl, Shorebirds, Wading Birds, and Gulls

As always, the nonraptor season totals for the species that we annually monitor are not anywhere near as scientific as our raptor counts. Here are the 2009 totals—Great Blue Heron 13 (peak, three on two dates); American White Pelican 2,107 (peak, 675 on 27 September); Double-crested Cormorant 7,100 (peak, 1,628 on 28 September); Snow Goose 114,414 (peak, 47,700 on 4 December); Ross's Goose 261 (peak, 100 on 20 November); Franklin's Gull 3,505 (peak, 1,750 on 25 September); and Ring-billed Gull 200 (peak, 59 on 16 November). Overall, totals for this group were quite mixed. Totals for Franklin's Gulls (the counts of which annually vary in tandem with those for Swainson's Hawks) were extremely poor. Ring-billed Gull totals, along with those for Snow Geese, were down sharply. Totals for all the other species though were average or somewhat above average. The total for Ross's Geese was a new HNC hawk watch record.

Passerines and Corvids

Other than a very poor showing for Eastern Kingbird with a season total of 54 (peak of 46 on 23 August), totals for this group were either average or excellent. Falling into the average category were Blue Jay 7,678 (peak, 1,200 on 4 October) and American Crow 22,329 (peak, 8,695 on 23 October). The 2009 season total of 1,860 Red-headed Woodpeckers (peak, 521 on 6 September) was a runaway new record.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A very special thanks to Brett Ford, Chad Graeve, Kelly Herek, Tina Popson, Andrew Albright, Carla Alschwede, Elaine Bachel, Elliott Bedows, Aaron Brees, John Carlini, Fritz Davis, Linda Dennis, Steve Dinsmore, Dog (2008–2009 official hawk watch canine and hawk counter's dog), Ryan Evans (who again did a wonderful job all season as HNC hawk watch counter), Betsy Finch, Chuck Fuller, Matt Giovanni, Griffin (official hawk watch canine and volunteer mascot), Jonas Grundman, Mike Havlik, Paul Hertzell, Stan How, Bill Johnson, Clem Klaphake, Denise Lewis, Tucker Lutter, Mary Kramer, Don and Shirley Maas, Jean Martin, Sue Mattix, Jason McMeen, Jim Meyer, Greg Nelson, Mark Orsag, Babs and Loren Padelford, Don and Janis Paseka, Veronica Ray, Sandy Reinken, Jim Sinclair, Kent Skaggs, Phil Swanson, Steve Van Riper, The Wachiska Audubon Group, Phylisha Wolfe and last, but certainly not least, Jerry Toll (who continues to be the main driving

force behind the HNC hawk watch by logging more hours banding and counting than anyone else) and to everyone else who visited HNC and participated in the 2009 hawk watch!

Raptor Banding at Hitchcock Hawk Watch 2009

Jerry Toll

RAPTOR BANDING EFFORTS

The 2009 season marked the third consecutive year of the Hitchcock raptor banding program. The effort continued to grow again this year as 164 individuals of six species of diurnal raptors was banded during capture efforts that began on 1 September and ended on 16 November. This success was due in part to the dedicated efforts of two banders and numerous volunteers, students, and visitors to the banding station.

Red-tailed Hawk was the most numerous species captured. Of the 120 Red-tailed



Hawks, 96 were hatch-year birds fledged last summer. Two Red-tailed Hawks were second-year and 22 were after-hatch-year adults. Adult captures increased sharply in mid-October as did the occurrence of western subspecies. Of this year's total, 29 were of the western subspecies, *B. j. calurus*, two were of the Harlan's subspecies *B. j. harlanii*, and 89 were of the eastern subspecies *B. j. borealis*. There were multiple examples of intergrades between the subspecies where characteristics of more than one race were evident. Five were dark morph individuals and one was a rufous or intermediate morph. The Bird Banding Lab notified us that a Red-tailed Hawk we

Raptor bander Jerry Toll holding a juvenile Northern Goshawk captured during banding efforts, Hitchcock Nature Center, Pottawattamie, 1 November 2009. Photo by Carla Alschwede, Lincoln, NE.

banded on 2 October 2008 was recovered on 15 November 2009 in South Dakota near the North Dakota border.

All three species of *Accipiter* were represented in the captures during the 2009 season. Thirty-one Sharp-shinned Hawks were banded between 14 September and 1 November, of which 21 were females and 10 were males. Their age classifications were 19 hatch-year birds, one second-year, one third-year, and 10 after-hatch-year. Of the 10 Cooper's Hawks captured between 6 September and 26 October, eight were female and two were males. Their age classifications were two hatch-years, one second-year, and seven after-hatch-year. We recaptured a female Cooper's on 26 October that was banded by us on 21 September 2008. A single hatch-year male Northern Goshawk captured on 1 November was a real treat.

Single individuals of two species of falcons rounded out the captures this year. An American Kestrel captured on 16 September was an adult female and a hatch-year female Peregrine Falcon was a captured 1 October.

In addition to our diurnal effort, we added a full-time nocturnal Northern Saw-whet Owl trapping effort this year! The season extended from 8 October to 28 November and we banded 39 owls and recaptured two more that had been banded elsewhere. Each daily trapping session extended from sunset to midnight. The season began slowly and we recorded our first capture on 15 October. The peak season, determined by the first and last night with multiple captures, was from 23 October to 26 November. The last capture was 26 November. We had a total of 33 banding sessions this year totaling 117.5 hours of effort, which yields 0.33 captures per hour. The age breakdown of captured owls was 28 hatch-year, six second-year, four after-hatch-year, and one age unknown. The gender breakdown was 33 females, two males, and four gender unknown, which illustrates a strong bias for females. Two Northern Saw-whet Owls were captured that were banded earlier in the fall at another banding station. One was banded at Hawk Ridge in Duluth, Minnesota, just 13 days earlier. It had traveled an average of 32 miles per night to reach Hitchcock! No information on the origin of the other banded owl is available yet.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the Projects Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, The Audubon Society of Omaha, and the Pottawattamie County Conservation Board for funding to support salaries and purchase replacement mist nets used in the operation for next banding season. Sandy Reinken deserves special mention as the assistant bander this season. I thank the following volunteers who generously gave their time and greatly added to the efficiency of the station: Denise Lewis and Carla Alschwede generously gave up a day a week from their busy schedules to band with us, Janis Paseka, Matt Giovanni, and Steve Van Riper were able to band occasionally.

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