

***Raptorthon at Hawk Mountain's North Lookout,  
April 22, 2011, Earth Day.***

Goal: to count as many species as possible either seen or heard from the North Lookout. Time: 7:45 a.m. to 5:15 EDT p.m.

Weather: Heavy overcast all day with brief spot of sun breaking through midday; East to southeast winds 5-15 mph persist all day, Temperatures 5-9 Celsius, rain starts spitting around 5:15 pm after all other people had left. Wind and pending rain probably limited the species detected.

Other spotters –Arianna Tejada Tellez (MX), Bidur Khadka (Nepal), Sue Schmoyer, and several visiting families or individuals that lingered for raptor watching including Reading Eagle newspaper reporter and photographer.

Donations: to support Hawk Mountain and Hawk Migration Association of North America raptor monitoring programs.

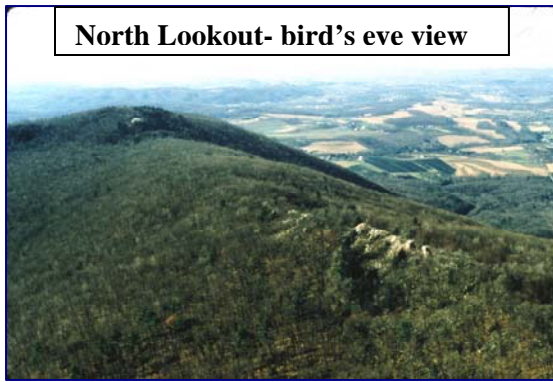
**Total species = 40. Raptor species =10, non-raptors=30.**

<b>Raptor Species</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1.Turkey Vulture	First raptor of the day, and last one as well. They perch early and late next to lookout in an ancient tree just below the Lookout. At end of day I get the sense they would like me to leave so they can roost in peace. So as mist hugs the mountain, I leave the rocks to them.
2.Osprey	Several migrants today, but my first one was hunting over the pond on the old Pritchard farm right below north side. It then perched in a tree for awhile, was gone later. 1000 foot down but still an Osprey!
3.Black Vulture	First BV did not show up until late in morning when the local pair did a circuit of the Kettle.But the BEST sighting was in late afternoon when a flock of 16 glided in together from number 1 along south side towards North Lookout. They seemed to be looking for a place to perch (perhaps North rocks ? then saw the people and changed their mind). They circled over the Kettle gaining some height and then disappeared behind Owls Head. Could not count them as migrants though they probably were!
4.Red-tailed Hawk	Two to three adults hunting along the south slope most the day. Kiting in the east wind.
5.American Kestrel	The second raptor of the day was a male kestrel that came in from south to strafe the owl decoy just after 8 am. It then sat in the trees behind the lookout for a long time. Just me and the kestrel sharing the rocks. He kept searching for prey but none appeared. Then he left to the east. Not sure if he saw me and did not care.. or did not see me.
6.Broad-winged Hawk	The first one appeared at 8:45 am at eye level on south side. It was joined by a second one to chase away a

	hunting redtail hanging over South Lookout-perhaps this is our local pair defending their territory! Several migrants passed over heading north throughout the day as well, often high and alone. No kettles today.
7.Bald Eagle	An adult Bald Eagle glided in along the next mountain to the north heading west to northeast at 921 am. It was quite far out and was spotted by Arianna. We watched it move to northeast and last saw it circling up and then gliding north from ridge east of New Ringgold.
8.Sharp-shinned Hawk	Several sharpshins were seen migrating alone through the day. The first one cut low across the kettle from Owls Head to number one, up over the ridge, and kept going to northeast. A definite migrant. Flapping off and on, in a hurry.
9.Northern Harrier	Brown Northern Harrier spotted during a scan to the south, it rose up circling over the ridge south of south Lookout and then glided on updrafts due west. Never came close, and not able to count as migrant. Long tail and dihedral distinctive.
10.Cooper's Hawk	I thought I would miss this usually common raptor. But after 4 pm the hunting Red-tailed Hawk by East Rocks was strafed by an immature accipiter. It circled up higher than the Redtail showing its rounded tail and large head profile. It then turned and headed east towards Kempton. Later I had perhaps the same one glide close to North Lookout along south side, into the trees behind the Lookout.
<b>Other Bird Species</b>	<b>Listed in order of detection</b>
Slate-colored Junco	Singing at North on arrival at 730 am and onward
Pileated Woodpecker	Calling and hammering in forest below in am hours
Brown-headed Cowbird	More than five seen flying around through the day
Blue-headed Vireo	Singing below the lookout from forest near River of Rocks! First of the year.
Black-and-white Warbler	Singing at North Lookout on north side, seen as well among Rhododendrons
Carolina Wren	In bushes on south side just near counter pit
Downy Woodpecker	Behind the Lookout in the trees foraging in morning
Blue Jay	Flying over forest, calling as usual, seen occasionally
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Calling from forest in front of Lookout
Red-winged Blackbird	Migrants heading over in morning, males
American Crow	Calling and moving below lookout on north side, near river
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Calling, singing and foraging around north side hemlocks and Rhododendrons. Two seen often through the day.
Winter Wren	Singing on south side! What an amazing song! Hope it stays to nest here as they did a few years back.

Tree Swallow	Small groups head south along south slope—too cold to head north I guess!
Black-capped Chickadee	Could be hybrid? Foraging behind lookout and singing BC song
Common Grackle	Flying north over the mountain in small flock (4)
Yellow-rumped Warbler	2 then 4 flit along shrubs in am along north side, chipping, perhaps foraging after a night flight
Unidentified Warblers (not counted)	Small flock heads south. grey sky too dark to tell what they were
Common Loon	Mid-morning a lone Common Loon flies due north over Lookout, later another one passes even higher. In breeding plumage.
Barn Swallow	Another group of swallows sweeps south along slope as if it was fall. I agree with them it feels like winter is coming!
Canada Goose	Four birds fly SE to NW towards New Ringgold area
Unidentified swallows, not counted	More swallows. could not tell what they were as they were far away in the dark clouds
Common Flicker	Calling bird pops up out of the forest canopy flies a few bounces then down in again near river of rocks
Mourning Dove	Arianna points out a mourning dove below on north side.
American Robin	Two fly past heading west together.
Wild Turkey	I scan the river to see if I can find any ducks, then see a large dark bird in the field right below the Lookout. Foraging in grass all alone..
Common Raven	A pair circle up with vultures over Hemlock Heights. They are probably nesting out there in gamelands 106. They swoop up and down a few times.
American Goldfinch	Two birds flit in front of Lookout to the north, calling their distinctive call.
Great-blue Heron	Several times during the day a lone GBH flies north over the lookout, sometimes far away. Twice one of us mistakes it first as Osprey, til the long legs appear. At least 3 separate migrants.
Tufted Titmouse	A tufted titmouse was a late show but called and foraged in trees off north side in afternoon briefly.
Fish Crow	A very cool sighting. Eight fish crows head due north across the ridge over East Rocks, calling to announce their identification definitely. Several visitors got to compare them to the nearby American crow also calling. I think they were migrating. (they have increased in recent years)
White-breasted Nuthatch	Calling from forest nearby in afternoon—another late addition to the list and last bird for the count.

Other interesting sightings—Blue wing-tagged Turkey Vulture, #70 seen several times through the day with first sighting at 835 am.



## **Laurie's Raptorthon April 22, 2011 Celebrating Earth Day and raptor monitoring!**

### **Getting Ready**

*April 20th. Weather report predicts 70% chance of rain for earth day, or showers. Hmmm. What to do? Should I reschedule until Monday? Aggravating. I check the weather every few hours through the day.*

*April 21<sup>st</sup>. Weather still sounds like rain for tomorrow. But a second report calls for rain to hold off til afternoon. Temperatures are supposed to be cold, with high of 45 degrees-...delightful. But. Where else should I spend Earth day? If it is raining in morning I will postpone, otherwise Raptorthon boom or bust!*

### **The Raptorthon Day**

*April 22<sup>nd</sup>. 6 am. Outside the clouds look heavy and fog hovers, but no rain. I hustle to gather my lunch, water, drinks, extra clothes, long underwear, rain suit, etc. I arrive to the Visitor Center by 7ish and find Todd Bauman already at work. Grab a radio and data forms and climb up the trail. By 730 I am nearly set up at the front of the North Lookout rocks, where we do the spring count. I am welcomed by a singing Junco as I figure out which rock to call home.*

*750 am. The first raptor! A Turkey Vulture sails along the ridge between south and north taking advantage of the strong east wind updrafts. Several birds singing below the lookout are added to the list quickly.*

*8 am. Male Kestrel flaps in from southeast to swoop at the owl decoy twice then sit in trees behind the rocks. Raptor number two! I love watching him look right and left looking for prey, oblivious to me. Juncos are wise to stay still. He leaves after a few minutes. With a little time to relax I notice the tulip poplar trees are budding along the south slope—a pale green added to the red buds of the red maple. And a few serviceberry trees are blooming! Splotches of white flowers on the lower slope. Despite the raw cold, I savor the quiet and solitude of the Lookout. I move over to the North side to scan around below the lookout and perhaps find an eagle or duck on the river. Then yes! An Osprey hovers over the pond at Pritchard's farm, then swoops into a tree along the shore. Not a migrant, yet still raptor species #3. Interns Arianna and Bidur arrive and set up for the daily migration count.*

9-10 am. Another Osprey goes over high to east of us. Clouds are heavy and dark, and birds seem to avoid the Lookout, either very far north or very far east. Excepting the loon that goes right overhead flapping. Kinglets sing and call among rocks. Pair of Black Vultures glide in along the south slope, ..species four! Soon after a very distant Bald Eagle glides west to northeast along the ridge just to the north. It circles up and I see a white head against the far ridge- # 5.

10-11 am. Two Red-tailed Hawks hunt along south slope, kiting in the wind. One approaches South Lookout to hunt over the forest. Immediately, two Broad-winged Hawks rise up from Hemlock Heights forest and escort the Redtail west. Perhaps a local BW pair?. Jacob Sanford and his mom join us at North for awhile. Jacob was a graduate of our Raptor Camp a few years ago and took our Raptor ID for kids workshop. He returns every fall. Now he is in eighth grade and hooked on Hawk Mountain and raptors. A future raptor counter. Sue Schmoyer, long-time volunteer counter, also joins to help spot.

11 am-12 pm. A Sharp-shinned Hawk cuts low across the kettle flapping up and over the ridge near East Rocks then low to the north, species number 8. Interns begin to shiver a bit and Arianna retrieves the wool blanket from the shed. Temperatures have risen from 5 degrees C to 7 C. I am dressed for November weather and glad I am.

12-13 pm. Few raptors this hour. Tree Swallow flock heading south instead of north. I hope they can find some insects today. Small family groups visit us through the day off and on. Everyone seems happy to be here.

13-14 pm. Common Ravens swoop up and down over Owls Head with a few vultures off and on. Scanning west from them I see another raptor glide upwards, as it circles it gives away its identification—Northern Harrier! It rides the east wind to head due west. I get the others on it after it starts its wing-on glide. We never see it turn to the north, so it goes uncounted as a migrant.

14-15 pm. A birding family visits and the father and daughter see a thrush below them just to the north of us. But by the time I get there, it is no longer there. They think it is Hermit Thrush. I look around as does Bidur but we have no luck. Interns leave at 3 pm to make their afternoon seminar. There is only Sue and I and a few visitors left.

15-16 pm. two more broadwings head north. A flock of 16 black vultures come in slowly from the east along the south slope heading right for us. Sue and I point them out to visitors. Likely a migrant flock but they are heading west and may be seeking shelter from the impending storm. They come near to us then turn to circle then stream silently to the southwest towards Owls Head or Port Clinton. Sue leaves soon afterwards as do most the visitors.

*16-17 pm. I spend most the hour alone. Finally see the last raptor, a Cooper's Hawk rises up to take on the kiting Red-tailed Hawk on the slope then glides east to Kempton. Twenty minutes later it returns to glide past North heading south west. An immature bird. Around 5 pm, a flock of 12 Turkey Vultures appears off the north slope, very close. Clouds are heavier than ever before and the vultures turn towards lookout gliding just over rocks or under rocks at front. I am standing at front so they are very close to me but I freeze so as not to disturb them. I can hear their wings flap. The lead one heads to the large tree below me and flaps into perch. Then another follows and another. Each one circles and then flaps into a perch. The only sound is wing flaps. The last two do not perch and head across the valley to another spot—perhaps the tree was full. I move slowly so I am out of their view. I count a migrating Osprey, Broad-winged Hawk and a quick flapping kestrel heading north-last migrants for the day.*

*1700-1715 pm. The vultures appear unsatisfied with their perch and all have flapped to other places along the ridge. My first and last raptor of the day is a turkey vulture. Rain begins on my way down the trail.*

Thank you everyone for providing me a great excuse to spend a day counting hawks in spring. It was fun—like a grand treasure hunt where I celebrated every new species observed!

**Special thanks to all the donors and supporters!** It is tough to find financial support for long-term monitoring programs. Yet it is vital to conservation.

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**Reading Eagle newspaper report on Raptorthon...**  
<http://readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=303224>