

Summer 2016 Newsletter

## Web Version

Chickadee Chatter

electronic contacts:

website: [www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org](http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org)

twitter: [@APAS\\_audubon](https://twitter.com/APAS_audubon)

contact APAS: [skylarkflex@gmail.com](mailto:skylarkflex@gmail.com)

Facebook: Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

latest count data: [hawkcount.org](http://hawkcount.org)

Editor: Brian M. Wargo

email: [brianwargo@gmail.com](mailto:brianwargo@gmail.com)

Membership use only

### *From the President*

I first visited the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch in the fall of 2009. My son Theo was two weeks old and this was his first outing. Immediately, I knew that there was something special about this place. Everyone was friendly, welcoming, and focused on the natural world. The people, the landscape, and those amazing birds—it was unlike anything I had experienced.

I was a birder, but not a hawkwatcher, and I therefore needed help learning how to identify hawks. The problem of course, is that the birds appear very small in such a big sky. Sometimes, the birds were impossible to find with the naked eye, requiring powerful optics to bring these specs into view. Someone would yell out, “Bird!” and everyone would stare into the sky. I stared, but often had trouble just locating the bird before it passed. Somehow, magically I thought at the time, the counters would mark down the species of the passing bird. At first, I thought they were kidding themselves, for there was no way to identify birds at such a height.

Despite my best efforts, and I tried very hard, I was the worst hawkwatcher in the world! Over many weekends, I finally was able to distinguish Turkey Vultures from most other birds. From there, it was an agonizing learning curve to separate the other species. The old-timers were not only identifying species, but were aging without hesitation. I just couldn’t get it. Thankfully, everyone encouraged me and more importantly, spent time teaching me.

Fast-forward seven years, I now consider myself a competent hawkwatcher. My family (Jeanine, Meadow, and Theo) has been integrated into the APAS family, and we now spend lots of time in Somerset, PA. This fall, I was elected President of the APAS. Clearly I have integrated into a legitimate member of the community that I found intriguing my first visit. I never forgot those first experiences with the APAS and I now hope to invite others to participate in what we have to offer. Hopefully, we can spread the magic to other nature enthusiasts.



The Wargo family’s first visit to the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.

*Brian M. Wargo*

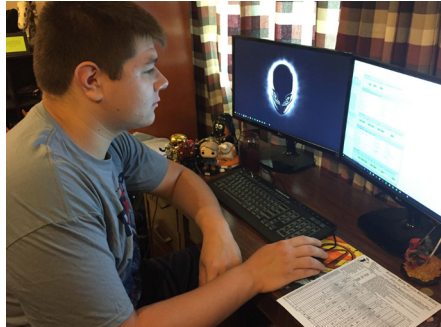
# Decade Old Data Finally Entered into Hawkcount.org

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch has migration data reaching back to 1995, unfortunately, not all of it is digitized. This is a problem considering that scientists and researchers access hawk migration data primarily from hawkcount.org. Many hawk sites, including the Allegheny Front, have vast stores of data sitting inertly in paper form, inaccessible by those who need it.

The Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) is encouraging all hawk sites to begin the arduous work of entering previous data into Hawkcount.org. One benefit of having the data uploaded is the security of the data. The original daily count papers are safely stashed by officers of the Allegheny Front, but remain vulnerable to deterioration. If something were to happen to these papers, the electronic data would function as a backup. Hawk migration data is like gold and it is worthy of protecting. The amount of time and effort expended in collecting data, through the labor of the hawkwatchers, justifies the effort needed to secure and share the data by entering it electronically.

At the beginning of the fall 2015 season, Allegheny Front only had data from 2001 and beyond entered into hawkcount.org. Bob Stewart and Brian M. Wargo set a goal of trying to get the 1999 and the 2000 data sets upload by 2017. Bob would take the spring data and Wargo would take the fall data. Anyone who has entered hawk data into hawkcount.org after counting all day knows that it can be tedious. It is even more laborious when entering old data because of the need to interpret what was written on the page over 15 years ago.

The problem, of course, is getting time to enter the data. Allegheny Front found a solution—his name is Tony DeCesaris. Tony is a student at Freedom Area High School and is a member of the Naturalist Club. Wargo teaches Physics at Freedom Area High School and is the Naturalist Club sponsor. Tony worked diligently under the supervision of Wargo, entering most of the fall 2000 and fall 1999 data into Hawkcount.org. What does Tony get out of this work? Tony used the volunteer hours to complete his senior project, which required more than 30 hours of community service. With the contributions of DeCesaris, Stewart, and Wargo, the 1999 and 2000 seasons (both spring and fall) are now online for everyone's benefit.



Editor's Note: Bob Stewart and Che Mincone have been working on this project for years, having previously entered three full seasons of spring and fall data. Fall data exists starting in 1989 for the Allegheny Front (albeit daily, not hourly counts).

# Renovations at the Hawk Site



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

About a year and a half ago, Tom Dick arranged to have a defoliant used on some areas of the hawk watch in an effort to stop growth that blocks the vision of the hawk counters as they spot hawks. The area between the eagle statue, as well as the grassy area near the hillside were both problem areas. The defoliant was successful, but was potentially only a short-term solution. To enhance the beauty of the hawk site, to maintain the area for observation, and to increase the parking capacity, a second means was approved by the APAS.

A local contractor, Henry Zubek, was hired to remove dead shrubs, trees, and stumps from the field and to smooth the top to accommodate an expanded parking area. Henry used a bulldozer to push the dead material toward the border of the property (towards Mary Jane's property). The work was completed over a week at a cost of \$3000. Seed has since been laid and grass is beginning to grow. The plan is to brush-hog the field once a season, thereby reducing the upkeep to one simple cutting a year.

To top off the work, five loads of slate were brought in and spread to increase the parking area.

Bob Stewart

## *From the Compiler*

### Raptor Migration Summary - Fall 2015

The Fall 2015 season commenced on August 15, 2016 and continued until December 26, 2016. The season was accompanied by very mild weather, with no significant snowfall encountered at the Allegheny Front. The warm weather allowed counters (Deb Bodenschatz, Tom Dick, Bob Gorsuch, Ed Gowarty, Tom & Janet Kuehl, Rosemary McGlynn, Che & Marion Mincone, Jim Rocco, Ron



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Rovansek, Bob Stewart, and Brian M. Wargo) to continue into late December.

Ron Rovansek had a day to mention on October 5, 2015 when the flight floodgates opened after two days of rain and fog. By 11:00 a.m., the sky had cleared, with light winds out of the east. The nearly shutout foggy conditions in the morning, cleared by afternoon. That is when Ron recorded 347 Sharp-shinned Hawks, a new daily record. Turkey Vultures numbered 324, the second highest day count. Also migrating that day were 8 Golden Eagles, 1 Bald Eagle, 2 unidentified eagles and 44 Cooper's Hawks. The daily raptor count was 800. A great day at Allegheny Front.

Another Allegheny Front record was set on October 24, 2015, with the dramatic flight of 74 Golden Eagles. Debby Bodenschatz was the counter this day and the conditions were good, with the wind coming out of the southeast at 10-20 mph and nearly 100% cloud cover. The flight ended abruptly at 3:00 p.m. with the arrival of rain.

With the uncharacteristic large flight of Golden Eagles in October, veteran hawk watchers wondered what the rest of the season would bring. Would it continue into December or would the Golden Eagle migration fall apart in December? The answer was Golden Eagle migration continued through November with 150 additional goldens. December was a disappointment though with only two more Golden Eagles.

Another notable day was November 21, 2015, when Brian M. Wargo was counting. With sun and strong southeast winds gusting to 30 mph, it was expected to be a good day. The sky changed from mostly cloudy in the morning to just light cloud cover in the afternoon. Visibility was generally from 20 to 40 km. The temperature was -0.7 degrees to +4.4 degrees. The first Golden Eagle was recorded at 10:57 a.m. Thirty-two Golden Eagles migrated that day. Fifteen were

seen after 4:00 p.m., including four birds after 5:00 p.m. The last hour's eagles were flying against a backdrop of stars, a very untypical setting. This day smashed the previous season record of 279 set in 2011.

The hawk site was manned for 833.5 hours and the total fall migrant count was 5035. This low tally reflects the Broad-winged Hawk flight of 1039, their lowest count since 1998. Birds per hour were 6.04. Birds per hour (less broad-wings) were 4.79. Turkey Vultures had their 11-year high at 775 birds, while Cooper's Hawks had their lowest count since 1996 at 115.

APAS would like to thank everyone who contributed to the successful season.

### Total number of birds per species for fall 2015

Black Vulture	55
Turkey Vulture	775
Osprey	83
Bald Eagle	112
Northern Harrier	55
Sharp-Shinned Hawk	1029
Cooper's Hawk	115
Norther Goshawk	4
Red-shouldered Hawk	42
Broad-winged Hawk	1039
Red-Tailed Hawk	1224
Rough-legged Hawk	2
Golden Eagle	320
American Kestrel	46
Merlin	25
Peregrine Falcon	20

## *APAS Holds Elections*

Every club, organization, or society faces a dilemma when asking for volunteers to serve in a position—it can make a favorite activity seem like a job. The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society is no different. The success of this organization has been through the hard work of those that stepped-up when needed, put the time and effort into building a solid foundation, and continue to do the often unseen, unrecognized tasks that make the organization viable. We thank everyone who has volunteered for a position, committee spot, or simply did the work that needed done, with or without credit.

The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society lives on therefore needs continuous attention, including formal officers. During the fall season, the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society was operating without a secretary or vice president. The president, Dennis McNair, was also retiring from the position. This left a large gap in the operations of the society, and, in fact, paralyzed the executive committee. To remedy the situation, elections were called for and nominations requested. When the initial nominations fell short, a second round of nominations was requested. This time, four individuals agreed to run, all uncontested.

The ballot was conducted and 34 members voted electronically for the new Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society executive committee. We appreciate the votes of confidence. There was almost unanimous support for the all of the candidates who summarily won the elections. Brian M. Wargo became the President, Jeff Payne the Vice President, Deb Bodenschatz (shown below with Yucky) the Secretary, and John (Jack) Julian the Treasurer.



## *Record Setting Gold Eagle Year*

The Golden Eagle Migration of 2015 was one to remember at Allegheny Front. The one-day Eastern Flyway record for Golden Eagles was set with the counting of 74 Golden Eagles on October 24, 2015. (The previous one-day record for Golden Eagle was held by the Allegheny Front since 2012 at 65 birds.) By the end of the season, 320 Golden Eagles set the all-time fall seasonal record for the Eastern Flyway. Combined with the 66 Golden Eagles counted in the spring season, Allegheny Front has the highest counts for a single year at 386 Golden Eagles.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

*Allegheny Front Hawk Watch  
is the Premier Golden Eagle Site on the  
East Coast!*

## Spring 2016 Numbers

The spring 2016 count started on February 28th and continued through May 3rd. The site recorded 672 migrants, the lowest numbers in 17 years. Raptors per hour calculated to 1.79. The site was manned for a respectable 374.5 hours.

Poor weather conditions in early April contributed to a low number of migrants. Rain, sleet, and winter storms were common. Sixteen migrants were recorded from April 1 –12.

There was no record count for any species.

The season count for Golden Eagles (65) and Bald Eagles (23) remained strong. Fifteen Golden Eagles were recorded on March 1 and again on March 15.

Broad-winged Hawks numbered 168. This was the lowest number since 2001.

Red-shouldered Hawks (14) numbers were low for the third consecutive year.

I would like to acknowledge our counters for the effort. Deb Bodenschatz, Jim Rocco, Rosemary McGlynn, Ed Gowarty, Tom Dick, Brian M. Wargo, and Bob Stewart counted tirelessly each week.

## Total number of birds per species for Spring 2016

Black Vulture	8
Turkey Vulture	54
Osprey	34
Bald Eagle	23
Northern Harrier	13
Sharp-Shinned Hawk	70
Cooper's Hawk	25
Norther Goshawk	5
Red-shouldered Hawk	14
Broad-winged Hawk	168
Red-Tailed Hawk	146
Rough-legged Hawk	0
Golden Eagle	65
American Kestrel	12
Merlin	5
Peregrine Falcon	2

## Pictures



Three wise men! Dave Darney, Wayne Sierer, and Bob Stewart



The rowdy bunch! Back left to right: Kevin Georg, Nancy Flament, Jim Rocco  
Front row from left: Ed Gowarty and Gene Flament

## Outings and Events

July 10th - North American Butterfly Count. As most of you know, our count is one of the highest counts in the Northeast. If you want to learn your butterflies, this outing is perfect since we average around 50 species and there is no pressure. The count circle includes the high Allegheny Plateau and the hill and valley region of Bedford County. Contact Sally Dick (sallydick7@gmail.com) for information.

July 23rd - Kittatinning Roundtable at Hawk Mountain's Acopian Center from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. An annual meeting of hawkwatchers from across Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey (surrounding areas are quite welcome too! NJ, DE, NY etc.). Contact Laurie J. Goodrich at hawkmountain.org.

July 23rd - Moth Lighting at Night is another way to appreciate biodiversity. Set-ups will be at Windber Recreational Park or at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area. Past events were highly successful, but are dependent on the weather. Check the chapter website (www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org) for exact times, dates, and cancellations.

August 4th - Workday at the Hawk Watch.

August 7th - Audubon Picnic at Hidden Acres Farm starting at noon - We will have another pig roast. Members are asked to bring their own drinks, a covered dish, and lawn chair or blanket. In addition to some pretty serious eating, we will be collecting snakes, perhaps butterflies, have some walks on the trails and perhaps an outing to the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch which is just a mile away.

August 15 - December 30 --- Fall Hawk and Eagle Count at the Allegheny Front: The hawk watch provides an incredible view and is also the most important ridge on a yearly basis for the Eastern Golden Eagle. It is known for its 17 species of raptors and the excellent close views, especially on East wind days.

Oct. to Nov.—Owl Banding with Dave Darney, our official bander at the hawk watch on weekends. Members can help with this outing by tending to the nets. Dress warm, bring a folding chair, and a flashlight. Enjoy your nocturnal experience! Park along Lambert Mt. Road and walk in the lane. Banding starts around 7 pm. Late night helpers are particularly valuable on busy nights. Usually the banding starts around Oct. 9th and extends into the first part of November (watch the chapter website). As we get closer, check our website and twitter feed.

## 2016-2017 CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP DUES REMINDER

Sept 1 2016 to Aug 31 2017 (chapter dues)

www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org

Please complete this form (or print one from our website) with your check and mail to:

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society  
c/o Bob Stewart  
257 Krings St.  
Johnstown, PA 15904

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

County \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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You will receive occasional news bulletins and event reminders by email or twitter.

The Chickadee Chatter newsletter will be sent to you either through e-mail or snail mail (email saves on paper and postage).

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP ONLY (make checks payable to: Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society)

\_\_\_\_ I am a new member- chapter only (\$15 check)

\_\_\_\_ I am renewing my membership- chapter only (\$15 check)

\_\_\_\_ I am including a donation to the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

Amount of donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_