

Oakland Owlets Discover Hawk Migration

Oakland Owlets families and friends gathered on a sunny Saturday, September 18th at Lake Erie Metropark in Brownstown to view Hawk migration. Mark Hainen, from Detroit River Hawk Watch and wildlife biologist Jessica Fletcher from the International Wildlife Refuge (IWR) met the YBC participants. Mark and Jessica explained the importance and history of the count at the site. The Detroit River Hawk Watch count is located at the boat launch at Lake Erie Metropark. The Detroit River flows into Lake Erie just south of the site. It is one of the premier fall hawk sites in North America. Hundreds of thousands of hawks migrate over this site in the fall. Data from this site has helped understand this natural spectacle since 1983.



Broad-winged Hawks were flying south in large numbers on 9/18 along with an assortment of other raptors. Jessica provided a calendar of hawk migration to the group. The timing of hawk species moving south changes over the fall. Broad-winged hawks migrate in mass early while others, like the Rough-legged hawk, migrate later. Hawk migration spans the entire fall. Observers are on site from September to the end of November.

Counting hawks is a serious undertaking. Official counters follow specific protocols. Mark explained how observers count the hawks but avoid duplication to assure the accuracy of the data. The counters concentrate on the hawks. After this brief introduction, the young birders families and friends settled in to watch for hawks. Other people were doing the same activity.



Hawk watching is a different activity from a regular young birders' club field trip. We waited for the hawks. It was not long before the group saw its first group of Broad-winged hawks. The group learned to look for the small buteo shape and the bands on the tails as hawks streamed out of kettles and flew overhead. Other raptors seen on this field trip included, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrel, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Osprey, Northern Harrier and Bald Eagle. Bald Eagles nest near the Hawk Watch site; observers only count migrating hawks. Counters differentiated between migration eagles and residents.



After about an hour of hawk watching, part of the group walked to the Marshland Museum which is the park's Nature Center. The short hike long the boardwalk was a change from sitting and allowed the group to see ducks,

herons, and other birds not found along the river. A captive Bald Eagle lives in a flight cage outside the museum. The eagle is unable to survive on its own. The museum was busy, but a wonderful place to visit and learn about the Lake Erie Metropark.



The bird checklist kept during the visit by the young birders' club included **thirty-two species and 229 individuals**. The official count at the DRHW for September 18th was 8738 hawks; 8491 were Broad-winged hawks. In addition to counting hawks, the DRHW counters also record migrating Monarch Butterflies. That day 2,068 Monarch butterflies flew by. The checklist for the young birders' club submitted that day is as follows.

The Bird Checklist:

Canada Goose
Blue-winged Teal
Gadwall
Mallard
Mourning Dove
Ring-billed Gull
Caspian Tern
Forster's Tern
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Bald Eagle

Broad-winged Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Belted Kingfisher
Downy Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Blue Jay
Black-capped Chickadee
Tree Swallow
White-breasted Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
American Robin
Cedar Waxwing
American Goldfinch
Red-winged Blackbird
Bay-breasted Warbler
Northern Cardinal

The location of the Detroit River Hawk Watch site is ideal for counting hawks. Hawks move south riding thermals which are pockets of warm air raising over the land. Thermals dissipate over the water. Hawk watching requires concentration and knowledge of raptor profiles. Hawks appear at a distance. All young birders learned hawk profiles at the Detroit River Hawk Watch site [Detroit River Hawk Watch](#). This amazing migration passing through our area every fall and is stunning to see.

A special thanks to **Mark Hainen** from DRHW and **Jessica Fletcher** from the IWR for sharing their expertise with the group.



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