

College Creek Hawkwatch 2008

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This was the 12th consecutive season of the College Creek Hawkwatch, located on the James River, 3 miles southeast of Williamsburg, conducted by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. It's the only late winter and spring hawkwatch annually run in Virginia. It was conducted from February 9th through May 31st. The hawkwatch completed 66 days (4th highest) and 106.5 hours (5th highest). The total of 1304 birds was the 6th highest. The birds per hour average of 12 compares almost perfectly to an 11 year average of 11.6. The protocol remained the same as in the previous 11 seasons: a daily watch was conducted, weather permitting, between about 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., Eastern Standard Time. All hawks and vultures crossing the river headed north were tallied.

Compared to last year's record coverage of 82 days and 147.5 hours, this season's coverage is far behind, however, the 2008 season coverage was ahead of most previous years. There was a lot of cool, wet and windy weather which led to monthly totals of 71 for February (7th highest); 495 for March (6th highest); and 359 for April (8th highest). Quite a surprise was the best May ever at 379, by a wide margin over the next best May at only 251.

The biggest days were 87 on March 2nd, with 62 Turkey Vultures and 13 Black Vultures; 79 on March 22nd, with 50 Turkey Vultures, 12 Ospreys and great diversity with 9 species, the most of any day for the season.

Ospreys set a new season high at 255, surpassing last year's record 228; Bald Eagles had their third best year at 98, thanks to good May coverage; Northern Harriers tied the season record at 41; Broad-winged Hawks were second-best ever at 25; Red-tailed Hawks at 30 were only barely above the three all-time lows of 24, 24 and 27; American Kestrels continued their poor trend at only 12, with 6 of those coming from March 19- 22; Tom Armour was on hand for the only Mississippi Kite, an adult.

There was an active Bald Eagle nest, just west of the site again, though last year's nest tree was blown down. Adult Bald Eagles were regularly seen again over Kingsmill and Hog Island as well. Three Osprey nests were visible on old duck blind structures in the river. At the nearest Osprey nest, the parents were feeding at least one chick as the season ended.

Species	total	peak flight & date	range of occurrence
Black Vulture	47	18 on 3-15	2-29 to 5-25
Turkey Vulture	731	62 on 3-2	2-9 to 5-30
Osprey	255	20 on 4-17	2-20- to 5-31
Mississippi Kite	1	1 on 5-22	5-22
Bald Eagle	98	10 on 5-23	2-9 to 5-31
Northern Harrier	41	6 on 4-26	3-17 to 5-30
Sharp-shinned Hawk	45	10 on 4-18	3-2 to 5-17
Cooper's Hawk	9	3 on 3-14	3-2 to 4-24
Red-shouldered Hawk	3	2 on 5-15	2-15 to 5-15
Broad-winged Hawk	25	7 on 5-15	4-18 to 5-30
Red-tailed Hawk	30	4 on 3-27	2-9 to 5-24
American Kestrel	12	3 on 3-22	3-19 to 4-18
Merlin	2	1 on 3-17; 1 on 4-22	3-17 to 4-22
Peregrine	2	1 on 4-22; 1 on 5-17	4-22 to 5-17
unidentified	3	1 on 4-11; 2 on 5-22	1 on 4-11; 2 on 5-22
Total	1304	87 on 3-2	2-9 to 5-31

Some non-raptor highlights included 3 American White Pelicans on April 13; 4 Lesser Black-backed Gulls on April 25; a Sandhill Crane on May 19; 21 Whimbrels on May 25 and dozens of high-flying Common Loons on a number of dates.

The 2008 daily totals were entered into the database at Hawkcount.org, for the second consecutive year. Fred Blystone has entered all of the previous years into the database so they can be shared and analyzed as part of the new Raptor Population Index effort by HMANA.

There were visitors on many days from a number of states and from Canada, the Netherlands and England and we handed out brochures and answered their questions. Posts were again made regularly to the VA List Serve. A very nice article about the hawkwatch appeared in the VIRGINIAN-PILOT on April 13th, with pictures of Tom, Bill and me, hawk information, hawk pictures, a map and a photo of the river. Many thanks to dedicated regular volunteers Tom Armour, Bill Williams and Fred Blystone for coverage on most days.