

Fall 2023 Greene Valley Hawkwatch

Commentary by Bob Fisher



Katherine Howard captured this plummeting Red-tailed Hawk on the foggy, drizzly morning of September 8.

Katherine Howard's 9/8 picture of a diving Red-tailed Hawk proved to be a pretty good metaphor for the 2023 season at the Greene Valley Hawkwatch (GVHW)—last year proved to be another generally poor raptor year on the Hill. No new species high counts were set in our 18th year of the GVHW, but one all-time low was set—the above-mentioned Red-tailed Hawks. Cooper's Hawks, plus Red-tailed Hawks, both seem to be declining in their annual numbers, that pattern beginning in 2017—a continuing drop in the number of migrating birds of this species to an 18-year low—291, 8 fewer than 2022's record low!

We all hope to see the Broad-winged Hawk spectacle every Fall—but don't always get our wish—because "big BW days" typically happen every 2-3 years when brisk northwest winds guide their passage over the Hill. In 2023 the total BW count was 604, under half our 18-year average. On just one day, 561 (93%) passed, carried on the northwest winds of 10/7, mostly in the morning. Noteworthy, but not spectacular; and if you were not there, you missed it. Not a record day, but worth the seeing...



*Our first American Goshawk in three years!
Photo by Jeff Smith.*

On the upside, Sharp-shinned Hawks rebounded from 2022's all-time low count. One Mississippi Kite glided by on 10/3, and two Swainson's Hawks were observed, one on 10/9, the other two days later on 10/11. After missing this species in 2021-22, a single American Goshawk (why the name change, click [here](#)) was spotted and photographed. The two 2023 newbies were a Summer Tanager on 9/14 (stayed for several days) and a Pine Warbler on 10/5.

A few other observations:

- Monarch butterflies were seen in small numbers well into November, plus we had a couple of dragonfly migration days (the latest swarm, mostly Green Darners and Black Saddlebags, was on 10/24).
- Horned Larks, American Pipits (first on 9/12), Lapland Longspurs (first on 9/18) and Snow Buntings (first on 10/16) were present as usual. The longspurs and buntings kept us company on a daily basis in good numbers later in the season. Juncos and White-crowned Sparrows first appeared on 10/17.
- We recorded our last Chimney Swift on 10/19, four days earlier than last year.
- Just under 25,000 Sandhill Cranes flew over during the season (24,000 in November!). Our biggest day was 9,700+ on 11/24. We did not see/count any Whooping Cranes—they're not "annual" yet!
- Zero November swallows this year! 10/22 was the last sighting—Tree Swallows.
- Inclement weather caused the 2023 count to be canceled on just five days, so our low totals were certainly not lack of time on the Hill.



Tandem Sandies! Who knew? Photo by Katherine Howard.

The Greene Valley Hawkwatch is now up to 193 species recorded over our 18-year history. It keeps us coming back...the birds, the friendships, but perhaps most of all, the genuine feeling of peaceful detachment from that busy world 200 feet below us. The 2024 season fast approaches! Let's put our eyes on the sky once again!

One or more of our dedicated volunteer counters/observers were on the hill for 559 hours during 2023; thanks especially to the indefatigable Jeff Smith, who once again pretty much carried the 2023 GVHW on his shoulders—up daily, scanning, counting, then logging/entering data in real time. He was ably supported by the other counters and observers who weren't able to put in quite as much time, but who all helped greatly in spotting and counting on many occasions. We were on the hill an aggregated 1572 hours.



What the heck is that, you ask? Phone pic by Bob F. through his SUV's skylight roof hatch – this buteo was only 20 ft up and moving fast. Consensus: Rough-Legged Hawk, maybe? It's worthy of a prize for the worst picture of the season--agreed?

As always, thanks to our dedicated team of volunteers, the DuPage County Forest Preserve District, and Waste Management for support of our Count!