

Bedford Audubon

Chestnut Ridge HawkWatch 2017 Report

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Summary

Bedford Audubon's 2017 Chestnut Ridge HawkWatch ran from August 25 through November 22, spanning 90 days. The count was held 84 days, totaling 589 hours, with 6 inclement weather days.

Mid-September was very warm with average high temperatures over 25 C; unseasonably warm temperatures persisted through late October. November 11 was the coldest day, with a high temperature of 2 C. Three Atlantic hurricanes, the season's Atlantic hurricanes: Irma and Maria in September and Nate in early October, likely impacted migration.

The grand total of migrating raptors counted at Chestnut Ridge in 2017 was 9,007, almost 3,000 below the 14-year average of 11,986. This is probably due to the relative low number of Broad-winged Hawks this season.

The migration timing chart for 2017 shows 3 peaks: the first around week 37 (mid-September), the second around week 42 (mid- to late- October), and the final around week 45 (early to mid-November). The September peak, with predominantly northerly and easterly winds, was characterized by Broad-winged Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, Osprey, and Northern Harrier migrants. The October peak, with predominantly westerly winds, was characterized by Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and American Kestrel migrants. The November peak, with predominantly northerly winds, was characterized by Turkey Vulture, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk migrants.

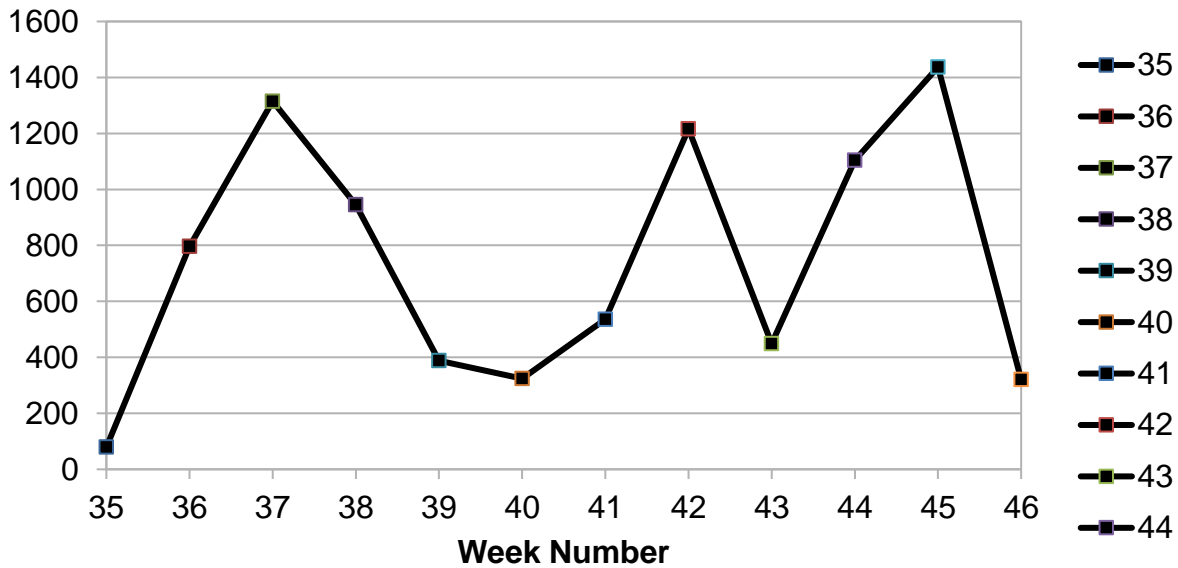
The most spectacular days of the season were September 10, September 16, October 11 and November 4. September 10, a day with light north-northeast winds, saw the season high for Broad-winged Hawk (459). On September 16, under very light southeast wind, an all-time daily high for Merlin was reached (17), and 26 American Kestrels were counted. Both species could be seen feeding on an abundance of dragonflies.

October 11th saw high numbers of Osprey (14), Sharp-shinned Hawk (81), and Cooper's Hawk (38), sharing the sky with hundreds of migrating passerines, Canada Geese, and Monarch butterflies. November 4 was the second-best day ever for Red-shouldered Hawk (167 counted); mixed with the Red-shoulder kettles were Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks. Wind conditions on October 11 and November 4 were similar: a gentle to moderate breeze, shifting from north to east and south.

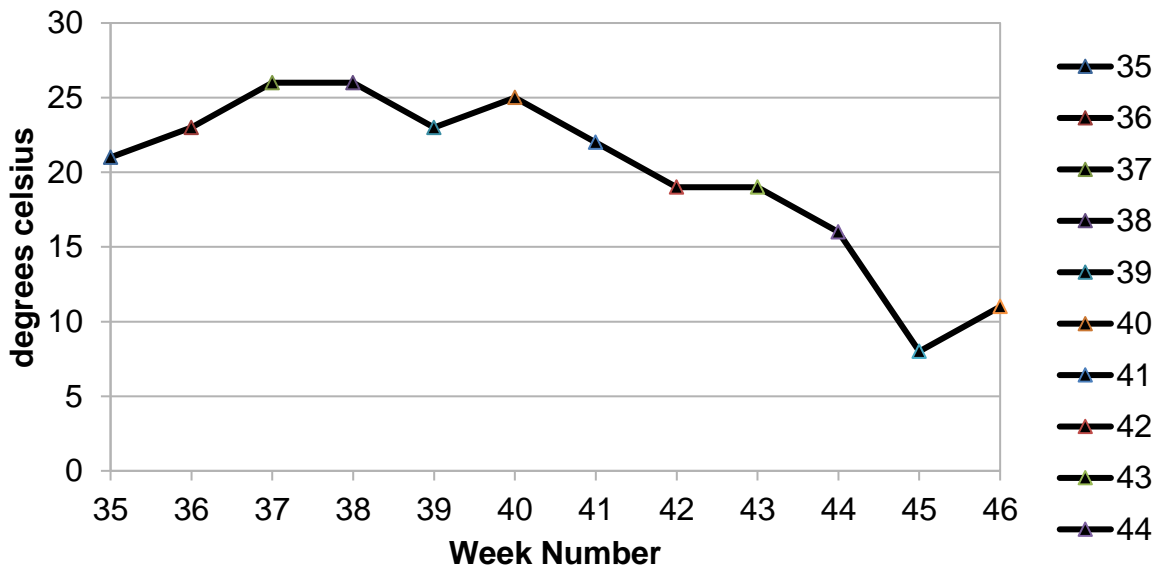
Week Number Key

Week 35: August 28 – September 3
Week 36: September 4 – September 10
Week 37: September 11 – September 17
Week 38: September 18 – September 24
Week 39: September 24 – October 1
Week 40: October 2 – October 8
Week 41: October 9 – October 15
Week 42: October 16 – October 22
Week 43: October 23 – October 29
Week 44: October 30 – November 5
Week 45: November 6 – November 12
Week 46: November 13 – November 19

Raptor Migration Timing (2017)



Average Weekly High Temperature



Migrating Raptor Summaries by Species

Note

A 14-year average was used for comparison, as this is the most complete data for the Chestnut Ridge HawkWatch publicly available on HawkCount as of the writing of this report. Historical data from Chestnut Ridge is in the process of being added to HawkCount.

Unidentified Raptor

94 counted (14-year average 73.8)

Black Vulture (BV)

29 counted (14-year average 51.3)

The migratory status of the Black Vulture is somewhat problematic. The range map in the Sibley Guide to Birds depicts this species as a non-migrant. However, there seems to be a consensus among HawkWatchers that at least some Black Vultures do migrate. On most days Black Vultures were seen, usually small groups of 3 to 7 birds. These groups would be wandering, moving in all directions including west or southwest (the directions generally associated with migrants at Chestnut Ridge). A conservative stance was chosen in these instances, except when Black Vultures were associated with migrant Turkey Vultures. Because of this conservative stance, it is likely that the count value is somewhat lower than the true number of migrants. A modest peak seemed to occur in late October.

Turkey Vulture (TV)

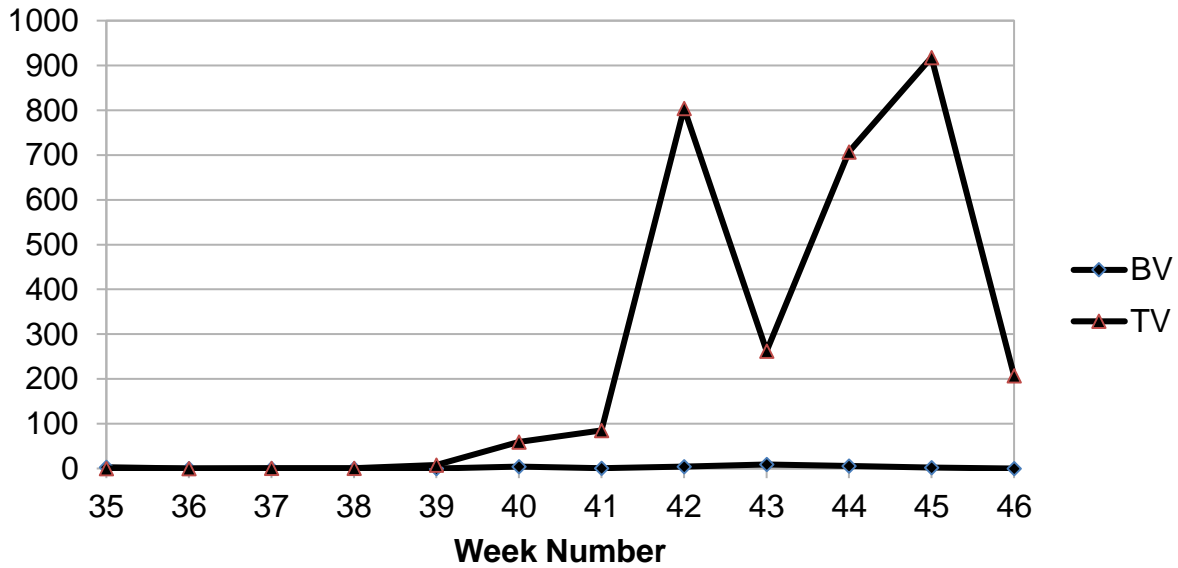
3,098 counted (14-year average 1,932.3)

Numbers of Turkey Vultures were high this year; it was the most numerous migrant. Throughout the season local (non-migrating) Turkey Vultures were present every day, generally numbering between 5 and 10. A conservative stance was taken regarding single birds that happened to be moving in a west or southwest direction, especially when their flight was low and searching. Migrants could often easily be picked out by their behavior: moving in flocks of up to 52 birds (November 8), kettling upward and gliding slowly but steadily west or southwest, like flotillas.

The slowness of migrating Turkey Vultures, especially distant ones, causes some difficulty for the counter. Staying with birds until they “go out” is very time-consuming and can hamper the search for other birds, so it was not always done. For this reason, a relatively high number of double counts and missed birds is to be expected, though these may cancel each other out.

Numbers started increasing from early October, showing a peak in week 42 (October 16 – 22), and a definite peak in the first half of November (weeks 44 and 45). The top three days were November 4, 8, and 9, with 242, 269, and 309 birds, respectively. On all three days, winds had a northerly component, temperatures were low and the movement of Turkey Vultures was concomitant to flights of Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, the three species sometimes forming mixed flocks.

Vultures

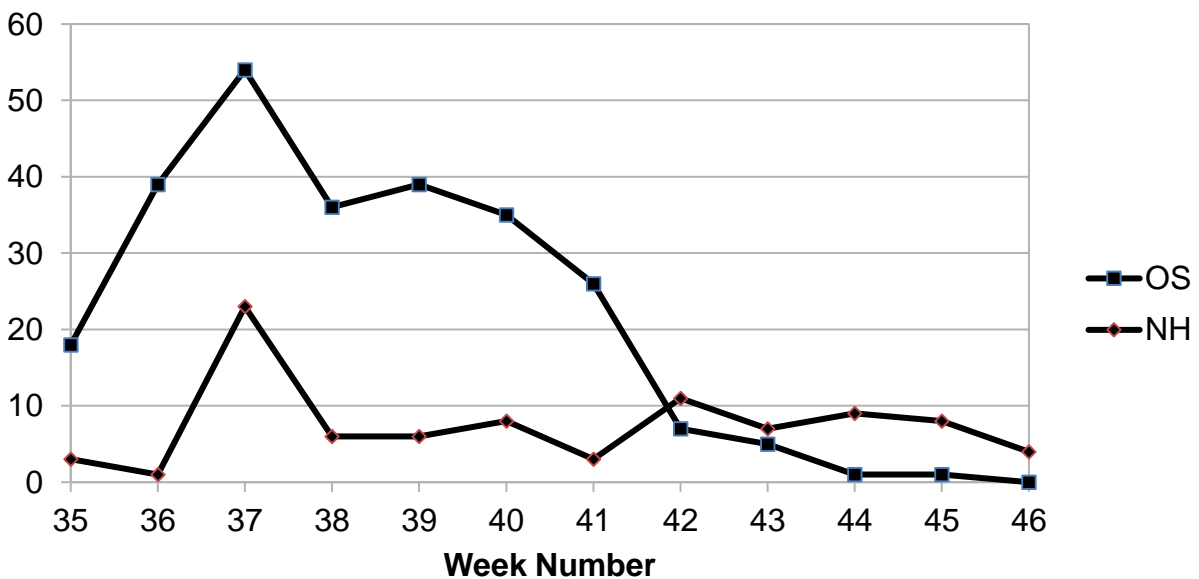


Osprey (OS)

263 counted (14-year average 318.3)

Osprey migration peaked in mid-September (week 37), slightly early (see migration timing chart at <http://hawkcount.org/siteinfo.php?rsite=534>). After November 1, the stream of Osprey almost completely dried up. The highest numbers were recorded on September 13 and 16 (12 birds on both days), and on October 11 (14 birds). Osprey is one of the species for which erroneous counting of local birds is a risk. One or two presumed local birds were regularly present, sometimes perching on the microwave or cellphone towers, or flying about with fish. Osprey that were not headed south, southwest, or west were not counted. It is likely that some local birds that happened to fly in the "right direction" were counted as migrants.

Osprey & Northern Harrier

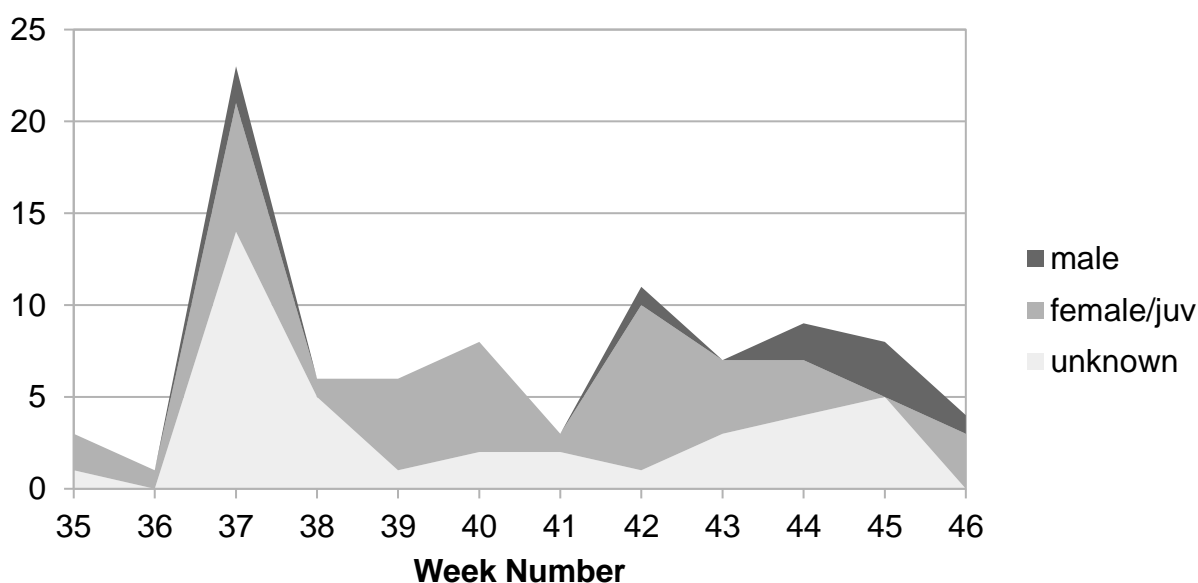


Northern Harrier (NH)

90 counted (14-year average 100.4)

Along with several other species (Osprey, American Kestrel, Merlin, Broad-winged Hawk), Northern Harrier peaked in week 37 (mid-September), which is on the early side (see migration timing chart at <http://hawkcount.org/siteinfo.php?rsite=534>). Week 37 was characterized by mainly easterly and northerly winds. The best days for Northern Harrier were September 12 (5) and 17 (6), and November 7 (6). Northern Harrier males, which are easily recognized, seem to migrate later in the season than the females and juveniles; most were seen during the first half of November.

Northern Harrier, sex distribution



Bald Eagle (BE)

149 counted (14-year average 78.3)

2017 was a great year for Bald Eagle; Chestnut Ridge has never seen so many individuals pass through in one season (the previous record was 113 in 2012). Migrants were quite evenly distributed throughout the season. The migration timing chart shows a sawtooth profile: a peak (such as occurred in week 37, September 11 – 17) is followed by a quiet spell. The best days for Bald Eagle were September 13, and October 10 and 31. On each of these days, 6 were counted.

One or more presumed local birds were often present, just hanging around or interacting with each other. On one occasion, a Bald Eagle was observed stealing a fish from an Osprey. Birds flying east or north were presumed to be locals. It is likely that some local birds that happened to be flying south, southwest, or west were erroneously counted as migrants. The fact that local Bald Eagles could be recognized quite easily by their plumage helped prevent errors of this kind.

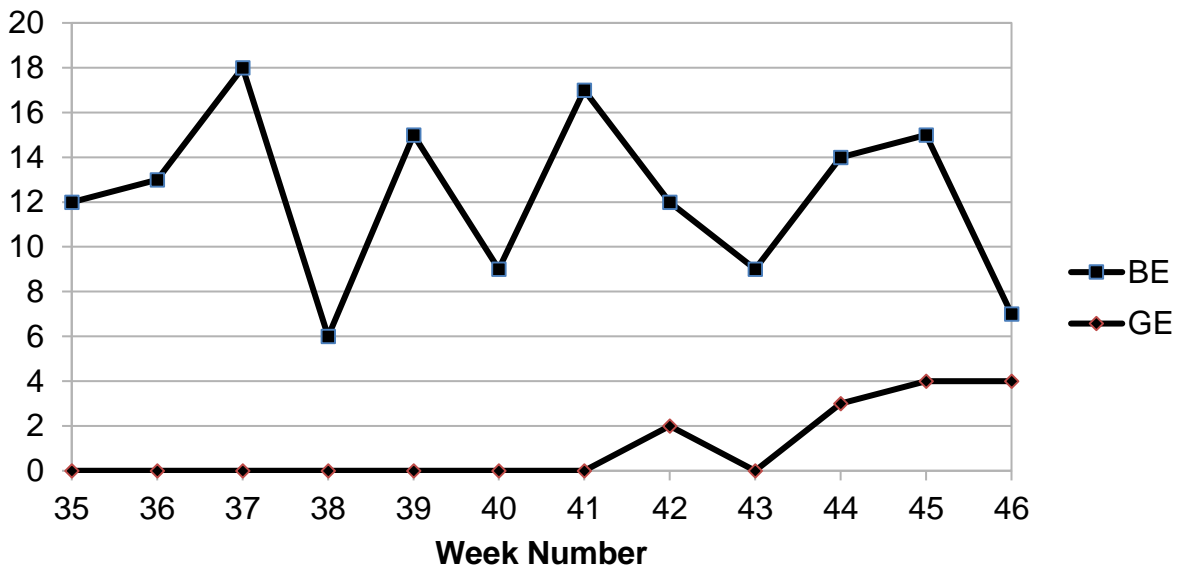
Golden Eagle (GE)

13 counted (14-year average 6.7)

It was a wonderful year for Golden Eagle as well. No fewer than 13 individuals were tallied: 9 juveniles and at least 1 adult. If you want to see a Golden Eagle at Chestnut Ridge, you

have to brave the November cold. Golden Eagles came through, like clockwork, between 2 and 3 PM on November 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16. The last sighting of the season was that of two juveniles flying northwest together on November 16.

Eagles



Sharp-shinned Hawk (SS)

1,270 counted (14-year average 1,836.6)

Sharp-shinned Hawk migration showed two peaks: a major one around week 38 (September 18 – 24) and a lesser one through weeks 41 and 42 (October 9 – 22). This pattern is normal for the species (see migration timing chart at <http://hawkcount.org/siteinfo.php?rsite=534>). The best days this year were September 21 (52), and October 11 (81) and 21 (53). It is likely that a good number of migrating Sharpies passed by undetected: because of their small size, individuals flying very high or far are easily missed.

Cooper’s Hawk (CH)

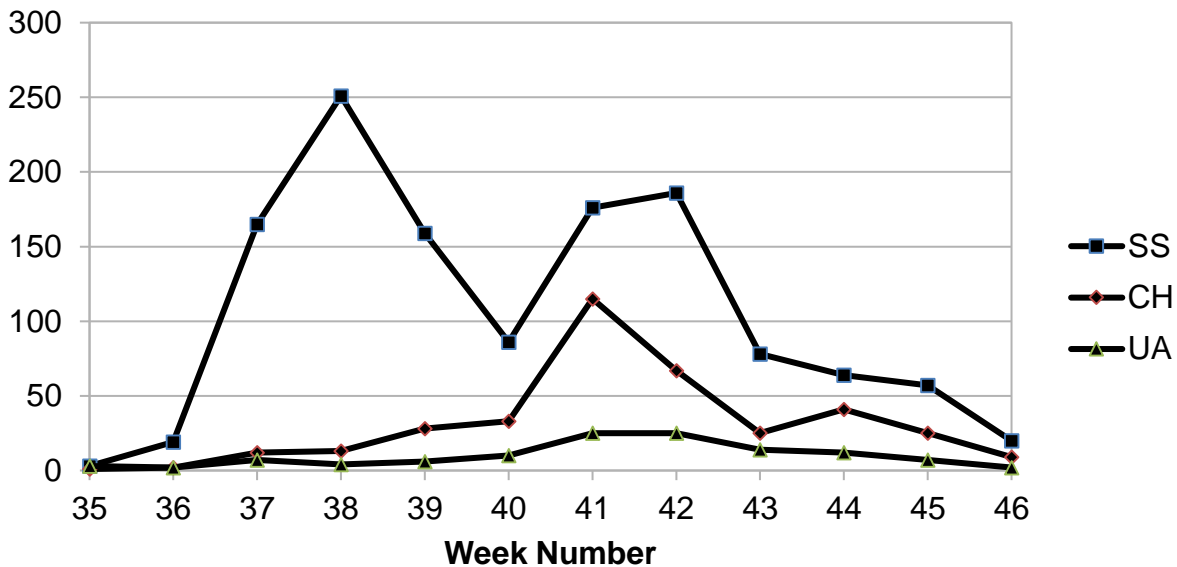
373 counted (14-year average 332.4)

The species peaked around week 41 (October 9 – 15), together with its close relative, the Sharp-shinned Hawk. It is hardly surprising that the category Unidentified Accipiter also shows a peak mid-October; especially adult male Cooper’s Hawks can be confusingly similar to Sharp-shins on account of their small size and their relatively short wings and tails. One or two local Coops were a familiar presence throughout the season. These perhaps juvenile birds could sometimes be admired displaying, with fluffed undertail-coverts and the characteristic slow, accentuated wingbeats. The best days for migrating Cooper’s Hawks were October 11, 12, and 13, with 38, 41, and 19 birds, respectively.

Unidentified Accipiters (UA)

119 counted (14-year average 64.9)

Accipiters



Northern Goshawk

1 counted (14-year average 7.0)

The Northern Goshawk was rare this year. Only one bird was identified with certainty, a juvenile heading West on November 12.

American Kestrel (AK)

334 counted (14-year average 339.6)

The species showed a definite peak at week 37 (September 11 – 17), when Merlin peaked as well. Their simultaneous migration may have something to do with the migration timing of dragonflies; both small falcon species were often seen hunting dragonflies on the go, as were, on occasion, Broad-wings and Sharpies. The best days for American Kestrel were September 16 and 17, with 26 and 36 birds, respectively.

Merlin (ML)

120 counted (14-year average 44.7)

2017 was an insanely good year for the fierce and agile Merlin: the season total is almost triple the 14 year average. The best days for the species were September 16, 17, and 18 (see Am. Kestrel), with 17, 12 and 15 birds, respectively. These three days had light wind coming from the southeast. Nearby Quaker Ridge counted 93 Merlins this year. The multi-year trend at Quaker Ridge (accessed via hawkcount.org) shows a definite increase of the species, kicked off in the early eighties.

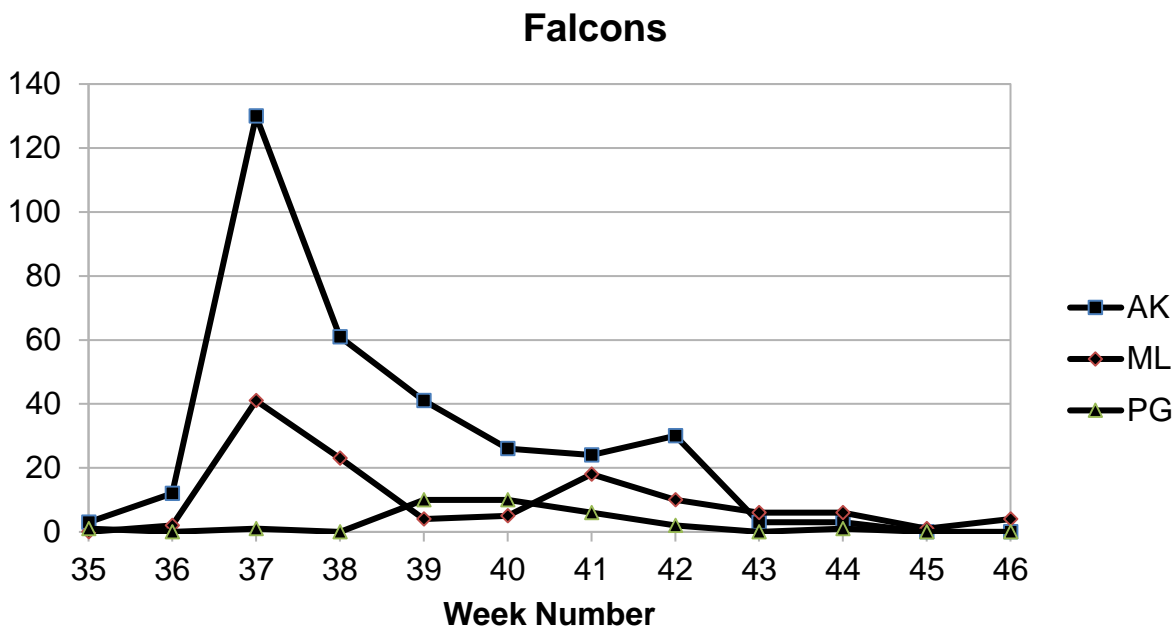
Peregrine Falcon (PF)

32 counted (14-year average 22.3)

2017 was not a bad year for Peregrines either; the season total lies well above the 14-year average. Peregrine Falcon peaked in weeks 39 and 40 (late September – early October), as is normal for the species (see migration timing chart at <http://hawkcount.org/siteinfo.php?rsite=534>). The best days were September 27 (5), and October 7 (6) and 11 (4). On all three days, winds had a southerly component.

Unidentified Falcons (UF)

42 counted (14-year average 15.0)



Broad-winged Hawk (BW)

2,133 counted (14-year average 6,203.4)

The peak of Broad-wing season this year ran from September 9 – 22; we tallied 1,988 birds in 14 days. To see this many Buteos migrate over such a short timespan was an awesome thing, even though the season total came out much lower than the 14-year average. Best days for Broad-winged Hawk were September 10, 11, and 21, with 459, 361 and 226 birds, respectively. All three days had winds coming from the north(east).

Red-shouldered Hawk (RS)

494 counted (14-year average 196.4)

It was a very good year for the Red-shouldered Hawk. The species peaked in early November, when the cold had set in and winds were blowing from the North. The best days were November 4 (167), 7 (63), and 8 (105).. Especially early in the season, local Red-shoulders were a familiar sight. Just one or two on most days, but sometimes (family) groups of up to 5 birds could be watched, often engaged in playful interaction.

Red-tailed Hawk (RT)

265 counted (14-year average 329.1)

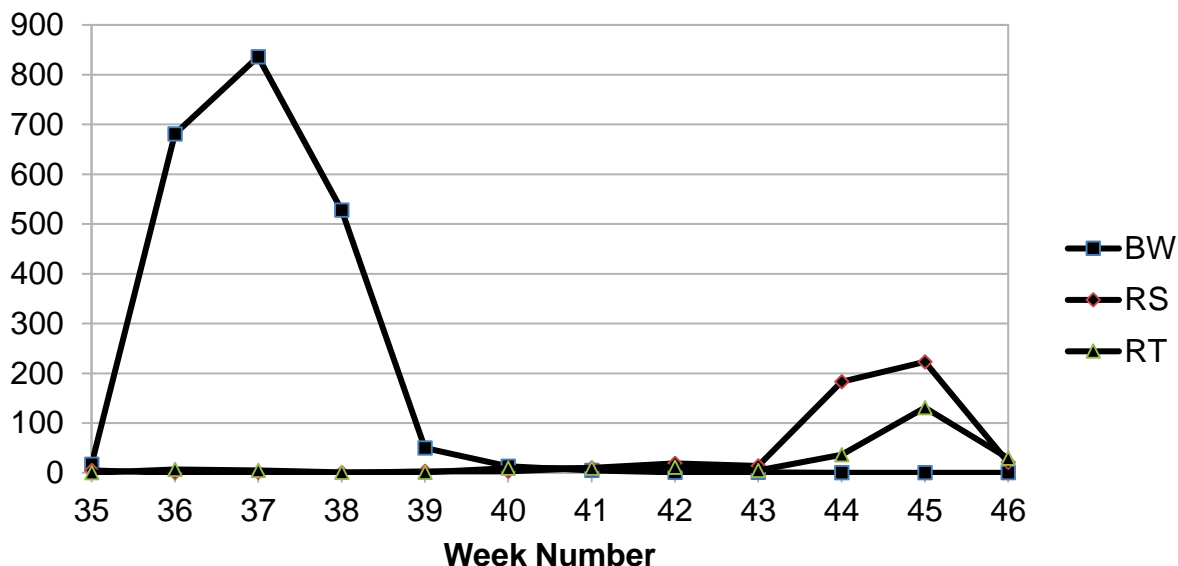
The Red-tailed Hawk was not easy to count; it was often difficult to distinguish between local birds and migrants. Around 5 local birds were present almost every day, and sometimes these locals would momentarily disappear towards the west, masquerading as migrants. Adding to the confusion, presumed migrants would often stop to interact with the locals and do some hunting before moving on.

For these reasons, a conservative stance was taken regarding birds that were not exhibiting determined migratory action (i.e. gliding high, straight west or southwest, or flying intermixed with Turkey Vultures or Red-shouldered Hawks). The best day for the Red-tailed Hawk was November 10 (31 counted). On that day, a cold, strong northwest wind was discouraging most other raptors from flying.

Unidentified Buteo (UB)

88 counted (14-year average 32.6)

Buteos



Other Migrants Counted

In addition to the HawkWatch protocol, some migrating non-raptors and Monarch butterflies were also counted. Monarchs peaked in the first half of October (weeks 40 and 41), with the highest number (113) counted on October 11. The total number of Monarchs counted was 1,206.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Common Nighthawk share very similar numbers and timing, with migration peaking in week 36 (early September), then declining towards the end of September. Perhaps the similarity in timing reflects a shared dependence of hummingbirds and nighthawks on the availability of certain nectar-producing flowers (in the case of Common Nighthawk via moths).

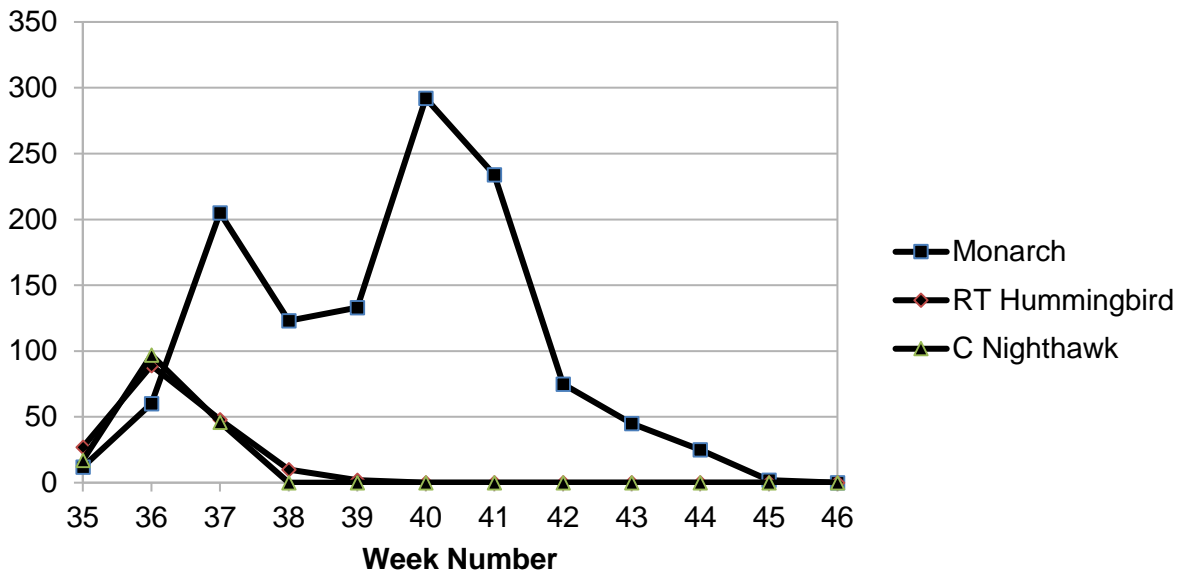
On several days, Common Nighthawks provided spectacular viewing; a group of 70 birds appeared in the late afternoon of September 7.

Flocks of migrating Cedar Waxwings were a familiar sight throughout the season; 1,671 birds were counted in total.

November 1 was a spectacular day in terms of non-raptor migration. On that day, which was overcast and unusually cold, more than 3,000 passerines passed through, including 1,685 American Robins. Also on November 1, 11 Common Loons were counted, a large percentage of the 34 Common Loons this season.

September 28 was notable with a sudden mass movement of 2,244 Canada Geese, and a similar number was counted at nearby Quaker Ridge HawkWatch in Greenwich, Connecticut. In total, 5,353 Canada Geese were tallied this season, the great majority after September 28. Early November saw migration of Brant, with 438 birds in total. Sudden migration of Ring-billed Gulls occurred on November 19, when 180 moved west in sizable flocks. A Red-headed Woodpecker was ticked on September 13, and two Great Horned Owls were seen briefly, flying in daylight on September 29.

Non-raptor Migrants (2017)



HawkWatch Team & Visitors

The Count was conducted primarily by Silvan Laan in the position of Lead Counter, Tait Johansson as the Site Coordinator, and Charlotte Catalano serving as the Interpreter & Spotter.

The following people also contributed to the HawkWatch (in order of appearance): Anna Butler, Allen Kurtz, Anne Swaim, Mike Paletta, Steve Bauer, Jay Gartner, John Klem, Ray Ferrara, Megan Comerford, John Salmon, Lynn Salmon, Charles Bobelis, Jack Kozuchowski, Kathy Hranowsky, Fred Pollack, Gary Squires, David Ahrens, Joe Gumina, Lou Schuettenberg, Jan Linskey, Pat Linskey, Phil DuBon, Tori DuBon, Jasper Hunt Thomas, Alan Alterman, Bernie Conway, Steve Ricker, Bill Anderson, Hadley Roe, Chris Graham, Jean Miller, Karen Troche, Pedro Troche, Genny Lawson, Blake Auchincloss, Steve Tulchin, Rebecca Rogan, John Gluth, and Kate Branch. Many thanks to you all for your companionship and effort.

The total number of visitors to the watch was 919. On October 11, the HawkWatch hosted the two AP Environmental Science classes of John Jay High School.