

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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News Release



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33RD YEAR OF MONITORING DETROIT RIVER BIRD-OF-PREY MIGRATION COMPLETED

GROSSE ILE, MICHIGAN – Daily updates of the continentally significant bird migration at the Detroit River began on September 1st and came to an end on November 30th – the same time period for the past 33 years. Over the last three months, thousands of people followed the on-line summaries (www.drhawkwatch.org/hawk-count-monthly-summary). Still relatively little known by the general public, the autumn migration of birds of prey over the Detroit River documents the largest fall passage of broad-winged hawks and turkey vultures in the Great Lakes and is *North America's* leading site for red-shouldered hawk, documenting *hundreds of thousands of birds each year*. The annual count, conducted since 1983, systematically records the bird migration using volunteers each day from September 1st through November 30th at the Lake Erie Metropark boat launch. One highlight from this year was that over 14,000 Broad-winged Hawks were counted crossing the Detroit River on their fall migration on four different days in the month of September (September 13, 20, 21, and 22.).

The program demonstrates the multiple benefits of long-standing, high quality citizen science programs. It has been coordinated by the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge since 2008 and is supported through fund-raising by the Refuge's Friends' group, the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance. Drawing thousands of bird-watchers each year and international attention, the Refuge is the official coordinator of the count and the steward of 33 years of migration data, including not only raptor migration, but weather, incidental wildlife sightings, and phenology notes.

This year monitored the passage of seventeen species of migratory birds-of-prey, totaling 159,510 individual birds-of-prey (e.g., hawks, eagles, falcons, vultures). This information is deposited at hawkcount.org with a daily narrative each night during the season. The program has corroborated other information that documents the region's increase in migratory bald eagles and turkey vultures (219 and 73,601, respectively in 2015) and contributed trend data for species of concern, such as red-shouldered hawk, American kestrel, and osprey (seasonal totals: 763, 816, and 81, respectively, in 2015).

This year marked relatively high years in species showing cycles of high and low breeding success, which almost exclusively occurs in Ontario and Quebec for those birds migrating at Detroit River. This included northern harrier (632) and American

kestrel (816), whose previous long-term averages are 472 and 932, respectively.

The season's complete summary is available at: www.drhawkwatch.org/Publications. This website includes many resources related to the migration, such as why it occurs here, how to identify the birds, and where they come from in Canada.

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge covers 48 miles of shoreline along the lower Detroit River and western basin of Lake Erie. It stretches from southwest Detroit to the Ohio-Michigan border. The Refuge focuses on conserving, protecting and restoring habitat for 300 species of birds, including 30 species of waterfowl, 23 species of raptors, 31 species of shorebirds, and for 117 species of fish. The Refuge currently owns or cooperatively manages 5,834 acres of unique habitats that include islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, wet prairies, shoals and riverfront lands. To date, 3,797 acres of Essex Region Conservation Authority lands and 981 acres of City of Windsor lands have been added to a Canadian registry of lands, and 7,897 acres of Michigan Department of Natural Resources lands have been added to the U.S. registry of lands for conservation purposes. When totaled between Canada and U.S., 18,509 acres of land in southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan are now being collaboratively managed and protected for the benefit of conservation and outdoor recreation in the spirit and intent of the 2001 Conservation Vision and the DRIWR.

To help make sure that a growing urban population values natural resources and that a priority is placed on developing the next generation of conservationists in urban areas because that is now where 80% of all U.S. citizens live, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has created a new Urban Wildlife Refuge Program. Under this program, the Service has designated 14 priority urban refuges, 14 urban wildlife refuge partnerships, and many other urban bird treaty cities and other urban refuges to help make nature part of everyday urban life and cultivate a connected conservation constituency who cares about wildlife. The DRIWR is proud to be designated one of the 14 priority urban refuges and the only international wildlife refuge in North America.

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