

RaptorWATCH

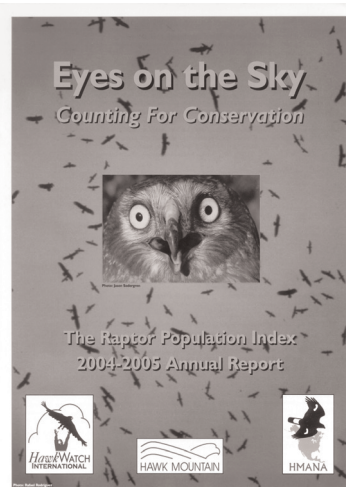
Protecting Raptors and Our Environment

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THE RAPTOR POPULATION INDEX PROJECT

AN EXCITING THREE-WAY COLLABORATION TO ADVANCE THE SCIENCE OF MIGRATION MONITORING

BY JEFF SMITH, HWI SCIENCE DIRECTOR



In 2004, HWI entered into a productive new collaboration with two other premier North American raptor migration research and monitoring organizations on an exciting new endeavor called the Raptor Population Index (RPI) Project. HWI's partners on this project are the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), a leading umbrella organization dedicated to supporting raptor migration monitoring in North America since the 1970s, and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, the largest and oldest member-based raptor conservation organization in the world. The vision of the RPI partners is to contribute to effective conservation of migratory raptors through continent-wide long-term monitoring of raptor migration, scientifically sound assessments of population status, public outreach, and education. To help ensure that our efforts are highly regarded and broadly accepted in the scientific community, the project partners have recruited several other prominent scientists to participate as members of the project's Science Advisory Committee, including representatives from the USGS Biological Resources Division, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Canadian Wildlife Service, and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

The specific objectives of the RPI Project are to: (1) produce statistically defensible indices of annual abundance and trends for each species of migratory raptor from as many count sites as possible; (2) provide frequently updated assessments of the status of each species; and (3) make those results widely available to participating count sites, the scientific community, conservation agencies, and the public. Lack of reliable information on the regional and continental status and trends of populations of many raptor species forms a conspicuous gap in North American bird

monitoring, yet many raptor species figure prominently as conservation priorities in national avian conservation plans such as those prepared under the auspices of the Partners in Flight (PIF) Program. Moreover, the recently compiled PIF North American Landbird Conservation Plan recommended "...improvement of migration monitoring to meet the information needs of many raptors..." Among other objectives, the RPI Project is designed to help fill this critical information gap and implement that recommendation.

On the RPI Project web site at <http://www.hmana.org/rpi>, readers can access an official project brochure outlining the vision, goals and objectives, and implementation strategy for the project, as well as a recently compiled 2004-2005 Annual Report summarizing the project's accomplishments to date and plans for the coming year. One of the primary objectives of the project is to refine the statistical methods available for analyzing migration counts to yield reliable population trends. Under the leadership of Dr. Chris Farmer at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, the project's analytical team recently completed an analysis of fall migration counts from Cape May, NJ and Hawk Mountain, PA and submitted for publication in a prominent ornithological journal, a

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Raptor Population Index (Continued from Cover Page)

manuscript that summarizes these analyses and evaluates six different methods of calculating annual abundance indices and trends. In the works are similar analyses and assessments based on data from a broader range of eastern sites, a suite of midwestern sites, and a suite of HWI western sites.

Successful peer-review and acceptance of these initial efforts and the associated analytical approaches will then set the stage for achieving the project's ultimate, initial goal of producing the first continental status and trends report for migratory raptors in 2007 based on migration count data.

Another primary facet of the RPI Project and one of the primary roles that HMANA plays in the effort is managing and working to enhance a centralized, web-based database system for storing and retrieving raptor migration count data

from across the continent called HawkCount (<http://HawkCount.org>). HawkCount is designed to provide count-site coordinators with an efficient means of submitting their data to the system and then retrieving useful summaries; researchers with an efficient means of accessing continental count data for various purposes; and the public with a user-friendly interface for viewing data summaries from various hawkwatching sites and eventually related status and trends assessments. HawkCount currently includes data from more than 150 count sites across the continent.

The RPI Partners collaborative effort began in 2004 and took flight in 2005 thanks to an \$86,100 challenge grant awarded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). This grant was based on an initial three-year project plan, and the partners were very pleased to hear in November that NFWF awarded the project a second year of support. These NFWF grants require a 2:1 match of non-federal dollars or in-kind support from other partners. To date, primary matching support has derived from in-kind contributions from the RPI Partner organizations, especially Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, financial support from participating hawkwatches and their supporting organizations, and other private donor contributions from HMANA and HWI members and friends. We are currently seeking additional corporate and foundation support, as well as continuing and enhanced support from a broad range of private donors. Please visit the project web site (www.hmana.org/rpi) for specific information about how to contribute to this very worthwhile effort.

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