

Seasonal Highlights - Fall 1995

Record Hawk Flight at Illinois Beach State Park

I planned a hawkwatch at Illinois Beach State Park, Lake County for 14 Oct. 1995. A front had passed through just hours before sunrise, bringing with it west/northwest winds at 15 mph with gusts up to 30 mph. Just after sunrise on 14 Oct., Josh Engel and I walked along the Dead River and a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) flew by. Then other hawks began to fly by, the numbers steadily increasing as the morning progressed. I then went with a group of hawkwatchers, including Wes Serafin, to a spot north of a stand of pine trees where Bob Erickson was birding. We had a great view to the west and north as hawks came down the river or along the tree line. Not long after arriving at the spot, Serafin noticed a very large black-colored bird flying in a dihedral pattern. It was obviously an eagle, but it wasn't until it came overhead about a half mile away where Josh Engel and I were watching that we were able to see the characteristic white patches at the distal end of the dark underwing coverts and white base of the tail. It was a Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*).

Merlin numbers really exploded during the afternoon. Not only did the falcons often fly close by, but most were also less than 20 feet above ground affording great views. Most were males. By the day's end an all-time Illinois maximum count for Merlins was realized—93! Later we learned that an amazing **479 Merlins** (a midwest record) were tallied just north of Milwaukee, Wisconsin at Concordia College on the same day

Sources: The Birds of Illinois. H.D. Bohlen. 1989. Indiana University Press; Meadowlark: Volumes 1-4 Illinois Birds & Birding, Volumes 1-7, Chicago Area Birds, S. Mlodinow. 1984. Chicago Review Press.

(H. Cohen pers. comm.). We counted 13 diurnal raptor species that day at the park. On 15 Oct., more northwesterly winds prevailed, but little cloud cover made the hawks more difficult to see since the hawks remained extremely high and looked like pinpoints in the sky. The two-day totals included 14 diurnal raptor species. The comments column in the charts indicate all-time high counts based on the list.

An asterisk before the number indicates an Illinois all-time single day high count, based on information from *The Birds of Illinois* (Bohlen 1989), *Meadowlark* Vols. 1-4, *Illinois Birds and Birding*, Vols. 1-7 and *Chicago Area Birds* (Mlodinow 1984).

Literature Cited

Bohlen, H. D. 1989. *The Birds of Illinois*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Mlodinow, S. 1984. *Chicago Area Birds*. Chicago Review Press, Chicago, IL.

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Table 1. Illinois Beach State Park Hawkwatch Totals

Species	14 Oct. 1995	15 Oct. 1995	Total	Comments
Turkey Vulture	1	25	26	NE IL high count
Osprey	0	1	1	
Bald Eagle	1	3	4	NE IL high count tie
Northern Harrier	62	105	167	IL 2nd highest count
Sharp-shinned Hawk	110	531	641	IL high count
Cooper's Hawk	3	25	28	IL high count
Northern Goshawk	1	1	2	somewhat early
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	1	2	
Broad-winged Hawk	1	2	3	fairly late
Red-tailed Hawk	74	301	375	IL high count
Golden Eagle	1	0	1	very rare in NE IL
American Kestrel	6	15	21	IL 4th highest count tie
Merlin	93	9	102	IL high count
Peregrine Falcon	5	2	7	