Patty Buettner Memorial Hawk Watch at Modoc Point Rim, September 24, 2022

The third weekend in September. It’s near or at the peak of hawk migration. And a Hawk Watch is a way where the birds come to you. Just find a place to sit or stand, preferably on a north-south ridge, which raptors will use to efficiently use up-drafts to ease their trip’s effort. Birds are moving south. You won’t see them for very long, but others will be right behind them. No wonder Patty Buettner liked Hawk Watches. Birds just keep coming.

It was a beautiful day, being sunny, cool at the start, and little wind. Dave Haupt and I started at the base of the large fault block on the eastern side of Upper Klamath Lake. With a spring nearby, Hagelstein Park is a migrant magnet during the fall, for birds to take a break, get a drink, or even a bath. It seemed like the slope was a migrant bird ski slope with literally hundreds moving towards the park as the sun rose higher. While there we saw a late Western Wood Peewee, and several warblers including Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Wilson’s, a Common Yellowthroat, and a MacGillivray’s. One California Towhee called from upslope and then another on the other end of the park. They might nest at that location. Other sparrows included: Song, Lincoln’s, White-crowned, and a Fox. While there a Merlin zoomed through. Great! The first raptor, a good sign since they are rather uncommon, and fast when they are seen! Interesting were two Band-tailed Pigeons that came down the slope to the water. They are often seen flying along this ridge during migration, especially in the fall. And with all the American Robins and Townsend’s Solitaires around, it seemed like it was going to be a great day up top. Julie Van Moorhem met us at the park, and we headed up the steep road adjacent to Hagelstein Park all the way to the top of the rim. Reaching the top, we could see some smoke oozing through low areas off to the west. Elijah Hayes eventually joined us, along with Stewart Janes and his wife, Deb.

One of the first things to do there was set up the “decoys”. These are stuffed crows, or maybe vultures, that have been named “Heckle and Jeckle”, being black with yellow bills and feet. They are attached to long pole and when erected, are well above the mountain mahogany there. Their purpose is to attract raptors in close, for better views. Raptors have such good eyesight, and seeing an “odd” perched bird, their curiosity gets the better of them, and they sometimes cruise right over to the observation station. Occasionally the birds seem like they are in attack mode, almost “stooping” towards the helpless plush soft fuzzy looking birds. Several moved in close to the bird on this day for excellent looks. The first several hours were quite dull for raptors, and thoughts began creeping in that maybe this location isn’t so good sometimes. Passerines kept the interest going though, with some wavering calls of two Pinyon Jays, and a bright dark male Williamson’s Sapsucker flew by. Lewis’s Woodpeckers like to move as a gang, so seeing loose groups of 31 and another of 20 shows how communal they are. Other species moving through included: California Scrub Jay, a group of 8 going in single file, a plethora of Yellow-rumped Warblers, and several small flocks of Band-tailed Pigeons moved southward. The first three hours was quite void of any raptors. The wind was zero to two miles an hour, and a waste of time for birds to expect to glide southward. They’d have to flap too much. Eventually, it began to heat up, the wind started to increase, and blow from the west. When it does that, the air goes up against the rim and birds follow that flow upwards blowing air. We are parked, or rather seated or standing, right in their pathway. And the raptors started coming. One of the first to be called out was a Red-shouldered Hawk. It’s not a very common hawk here. “Windows”, or seemingly translucent patches, out in their primaries were seen, and its shallow wingbeats alerted observers to its identification. The interesting part of the day was the number of Cooper’s Hawks. From noon until three pm, no less than 25 were seen. They are very similar to Sharp-shinned Hawks, both being accipiters, and since they have size overlap, with a male Cooper’s being close in size to a female Sharp-shinned Hawk, one must pay particular attention to subtle differences. Although there are several of those differences, one of the easier ones to use is that Cooper’s Hawk has a rounded end to its tail, while a Sharp-shinned Hawk has “corners” for the end of its tail. It takes practice to get it right more often. We counted 14 Sharp-shinned Hawks on this day. There were about 16 Red-tailed Hawks, and 62 Turkey Vultures. The group of observers saw one large kettle of vultures swarming above the ridge in front of us, and the kettle was carefully counted at 37. And while they were being counted, several raptors were moving towards us. One of them flew rather close, and with good lateral and ventral views, some plumage characteristics were seen that were different for that bird than any other birds seen that day, especially different from the Red-tailed Hawk. And after we all watched it, some observers turned to look at the others and said, “That was a BROAD-WINGED HAWK!!” Wow! Its underwings were rather white, and the trailing edge of its wings were trimmed in black. The very ends of its wings had a triangular patch of black. Along its flanks were coarse dark streaks that didn’t reach towards the breast of the bird. It seemed to have a somewhat buff supercilium. Its tail had a black band, and other bands that were dark, and the bands were a bit wider than the bands on a red-tailed hawk. Its neck seemed a bit thick. Those observations pointed to it being a Broad-winged Hawk. That’s a species that is very common, abundant, back east, with huge kettles that move south in migration. But here? The only way to see them is to watch hawks as they pass by southward, and be patient, at a prominent location, and maybe an observer will be lucky. And we were lucky that day. Two American Kestrels, a single Merlin, and an adult Bald Eagle completed the day.

It was lucky that we were able to see a Broad-winged Hawk on this day, and at a rather close distance, even though it was quick. We were lucky to have such a beautiful day, and fortunate to do so in such an incredible location. We were also lucky, and fortunate to have had Patty Buettner, working in our midst, interested in maintaining bird populations, and keeping habitats healthy. This day was a tribute to her efforts, and hopefully it is an annual event in the future, a way to be monitoring birds, especially on a hawk watch, something that she enjoyed.

This day happened because it has been done for many years, since before 2000. The day has been labeled as a memorial to her, and hopefully will bring attention to her efforts here in the Klamath Basin and stir people to continue what she started by donating in her honor. You can support and continue her efforts to monitor birds and help maintain habitats, by contributing in her honor to Klamath Bird Observatory. Please go to this site:

<https://klamathbird.org/callnote/avian-internship-memorial-fund-in-memory-of-patricia-buettner>

Raptors will continue to move through our area for another week or two before slowing down. Some will stay in the Klamath Basin, hunting in open agricultural areas, and others in rural or semi-rural situations. Using a scope in the refuge areas is a way to view hawks too, and from now through winter, they will be around. They are much more like statues instead of bullet trains as they stand on poles, irrigation pipes or wheels, or on the ground. It is a good time to study them. Enjoy the raptors and Keep a Keen Eye out for them.

Kevin Spencer

Klamath Falls, Oregon

…….below is the checklist for all species seen during the Hawk Watch

Modoc Rim Hawkwatch, Klamath, Oregon, US  
Sep 24, 2022 9:20 AM - 3:10 PM  
Protocol: Stationary  
Checklist Comments: Observers included: Stewart Janes, Elijah Hayes, Julie Van Moorhem, Dave Haupt, and Kevin Spencer. Weather, sunny, with temperatures reaching near 70 degrees. Wind calm, reaching 3-4 mph, S, and around noon wind became more consistent at SW-W. Activity low from start until noon, and then most of the day's raptor count came from noon to 3 pm.  
43 species (+2 other taxa)  
  
Band-tailed Pigeon 15 Groups of: 4, 6, 2, 3 seen flying south overhead. Heavy gray pigeon seen annually at this location, migrating during the hawk watch.  
Vaux's Swift 1  
Turkey Vulture 51 One kettle of 37 carefully counted, while all the others were of 1s and 2s.  
Northern Harrier 6  
Sharp-shinned Hawk 14 1s and 2s flying south along the rim during this approximately 6 hours of viewing  
Cooper's Hawk 25 One observer noted that Cooper's rarely is seen more than Sharp-shinned on this hawk watch which has been happening for over 20 years.  
Accipiter sp. 6 too brief or distant to determine with confidence  
Bald Eagle 1 adult  
Red-shouldered Hawk 1 fast wingbeats and "windows" seen  
Broad-winged Hawk 1 Well seen approaching with more shallow wingbeats, then seen well as it flew by with good lateral and ventral views. Underwings that were overall white with trailing wing edges trimmed with black, tip of wings with black on very tips of pointed primaries. Breast with whitish center, while flanks streaked along sides that did not go across breast, and with steaks that appeared to be coarse; with some fainter streaks at very upper portion of the breast, which may have extended across the very upper breast (however, I don't recall that detail). Tail with dark light banding, with terminal dark band being wide, and a light creamy edge to the tail, next to a wide dark band (and my recollection is that there were 2-3 dark bands, with at least the band at the end of the tail being much wider than seen on a Red-tailed Hawk). Leading edge showed no dark patagial (noted by one observer). Head had darker coloration, but there was a noticeable somewhat buffy supercilium. And head seemed attached with less neck as I recall. The striking streaking along the breast without a breastband, tail pattern, especially the darker wider bands, the trailing edge of black and black wingtips, and lack of dark patagial support Broad-winged, and not Red-tailed Hawk. Other Red-tailed Hawks flew past, and nearby and were deemed larger than this bird, although at the time there were no other hawks to compare size with it. Broad-winged Hawk has occurred very rarely at this annual hawk watch, being the 4th one identified.  
Red-tailed Hawk 16 Most occurred from noon to 3 pm  
Williamson's Sapsucker 2 one male and one female; another male seen, but going opposite direction, and so it was not known if it was the previous male seen in the area  
Lewis's Woodpecker 65 seen in groups of: 4,4,6,31, and 20, flying south along the top of the rim  
Northern Flicker 4  
American Kestrel 2  
Merlin 1  
Cassin's Vireo 1 heard singing at end of count period.  
Pinyon Jay 2 Wavering calls heard just east of the rim  
Steller's Jay 18  
California Scrub-Jay 19 one group of 8 seen flying S in a line;  
Black-billed Magpie 4  
Common Raven 7  
Mountain Chickadee 21  
Barn Swallow 38 two large groups of 24 and 14 passing through southward  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2  
Red-breasted Nuthatch 3  
Pygmy Nuthatch 7  
Brown Creeper 1  
Rock Wren 1  
Canyon Wren 2  
Bewick's Wren 3  
Townsend's Solitaire 16 moving through here and there during the count period, in 1s and 2s.  
American Robin 62 moving through southward, the entire time  
American Pipit 2 heard overhead  
Purple Finch 4  
Cassin's Finch 2  
Fox Sparrow (Slate-colored) 1 Gray headed  
Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon) 10  
White-crowned Sparrow (Gambel's) 19  
Lincoln's Sparrow 1  
Spotted Towhee 8  
Orange-crowned Warbler 2  
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) 1  
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's) 51  
Wilson's Warbler 1