

HMANA's Raptor ID Workshop at Braddock Bay, NY April 9-15, 2016

Spring raptor migration is a condensed affair that allows one to compare early migrants like Red-shouldered Hawks with much later ones like Broad-winged Hawks in just one week. A phenomenon almost impossible to replicate in the Fall. This workshop is timed to take in both the possibility of impressively large flights of birds, a diversity of raptor species, ages and sexes as well as such sought after species as Northern Goshawk, Rough-legged Hawk and Golden Eagle. All this and tuition in a small group setting from some of the countries best hawkwatchers.

Draft Itinerary (subject to change)

Day 1: Saturday, April 9:

Arrival in Rochester New York. We will start our day with a trip out to our home base for the next week and one of the country's best spring hawkwatch sites, Braddock Bay in Rochester, NY. Here we will begin with an in depth crash course in raptor identification, looking at identifying birds using flight characteristics, structure and plumage. There is the opportunity to tally all of the regularly occurring species of eastern raptors including less common ones such as Northern Goshawk, Golden Eagle and Rough-legged Hawk. Participants will receive expert tuition from tour leaders who will point out the finer points of bird identification as well as aging, sexing and recognizing subspecific characteristics where appropriate. Other birds we will encounter from the platform will likely include Sandhill Cranes, Snow and Canada Geese as well as a wealth of waterfowl and passerines as they linger in the park, on the bay or fly overhead.

Day 2: Sunday, April 10

This day will see us heading for the area's other famous hawkwatching site Derby Hill. Derby is famed for allowing birders both close encounters with passing raptors (head height flights) as well as for its significant flights of eagles, giving us the perfect opportunity to focus in on separating the two species encountered. While here, we will receive expert one-on-one guidance from our tour guides. We will also keep our eyes open for waterfowl on the water as well as passing land birds overhead and in the surrounding fields. On the return to the Braddock Bay area we will stop off to enjoy an area where Short-eared Owls hunt at dusk.

Day 3: Monday, April 11

This day will see us start early at Braddock Bay's West Spit. A sometimes alternate count site, it is the perfect place to get outstanding views of migrating falcons and accipiters as they jump off at treetop height across the bay, cutting the corner of the lake. This morning will allow us to focus on accipiters, and look at the pitfalls of separating these difficult species in the field. We will also enjoy the bounty of non-raptors that this wonderful migrant stop off point along the lake provides.

After lunch we will take a stroll through the aptly named Owl Woods searching for some of their roosting nocturnal denizens; mainly Long-eared and Saw-whet Owls, before spending the rest of the day back at the hawkwatch platform focusing and enhancing our hawkwatching skills.

After dinner the evening will see us heading out for a nocturnal bird prowl in which we will hope to encounter owls (Screech, Saw-whet, Long-eared and Great Horned) as well as American Woodcock and perhaps a rail or bittern.

Day 4: Tuesday, April 12

This morning the group will head bright and early to one of Braddock Bay's famed hawk banding stations to see the process of capturing hawks in action and also allow participants to intimately study a number of eastern raptors 'in hand'. This is the chance to get up close views of birds and see some of the key features of the birds that we have studied in the field up close and personal.

After a hearty dinner we will head out after dark to enjoy some more nocturnal raptors, this time with a visit to the Braddock Bay Saw-whet Owl banding operation.

Day 5: Wednesday, April 13

We will spend this morning doing some general birding at Hamlin Beach State Park, taking in the migrant traps and most importantly the lakewatch where we will hope to encounter a variety of waterfowl including 'sea' ducks, loons, grebes and gulls. We will also spend some time identifying songbirds in flight; another string that your well rounded hawkwatcher is adding to their bow. Wending our way back to Braddock Bay we will encounter a variety of birds in the surrounding fields, including geese, swans, ducks and shorebirds. After lunch our day will end with another visit to the hawkwatch for some more hawkwatching instruction, focusing on buteo identification through flight style, shape and plumage characteristics.

Day 6: Thursday, April 14

This day will see us back at Derby Hill to put some of our new found raptor skills into practice and to simply enjoy the passing show. Post lunch we will head to Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge to look for nesting Bald Eagles as well as the other raptors and a variety of migrants that stop off or breed at this renowned site for spring migration. We will also have the opportunity to reflect on some of what we have learned over the week as well as compile our list of species from the trip.

We will end the penultimate day with a celebratory dinner and perhaps a local beer or two.

Day 7: Friday, April 15

The final morning will see us back at the West Spit for a morning getting better acquainted with the passing raptors and songbirds. We will end the last day with a final lunch together before heading back to the airport.