

# Protocol for Hawk Counters

## Hook Mountain Hawk Watch

### Counting Hawks

We count migrating hawks of all species. At Hook many non-migrating hawks circle over the mountain, along the Hudson River, or in the valleys to the north and west. Deciding which hawks are migrants can sometimes be difficult. **We count hawks that fly south, west, or southwest and do not circle back.** We do not count in the rain, as there is no shelter on the mountain top. So, check the weather forecast, preferably a radar map, before climbing the mountain.

### Daily Report Form

Daily Report Forms, or data sheets, are available on-site, or on the web at <http://www.battaly.com/hook/> using the pull down menu under watchers. Counters complete these data sheets noting the hours of observation by indicating the time for each hour covered – usually the hours from 8am to 4pm, but often earlier and/or later.

Use these Daily Report Forms to record hourly totals for all migrating hawks, by species. Any **identified hawks that are not included on the list** should be noted under “Other”; the box in the “Comments” column on the right should be checked and the species name, time, and any additional information such as age, sex, behavior, etc. should be noted in the comments at the bottom of the page or on the back of the sheet. Hawks which are not identified to species should be included in the most appropriate “Unidentified” category.

Weather data, flight direction, height of flight, and the number of observers are also recorded hourly. Include as much information as you have available for the weather. Direction at Hook is relatively easy to determine. Standing with the Hudson River on your right and Rockland Lake in front of you, Due North is along a line of sight just to the right of the public buildings across the Lake.

### Simultaneous Counts

While it can be confusing to decide which hawks are migrating and which are not for all species, there are several for which this problem seems more pronounced – Turkey Vultures, Black Vultures, and Red-tailed Hawks. In an effort to devise a method of assessing trends for these species that is uniform among all watchers and does not divert the counter’s attention to watch for that hawk that circles in the distance, the NorthEast Hawk Watch (NEHW) has endorsed as a trial an alternative approach. **This does not replace our present protocol. It is in addition to our present counts for these species.** Having both methods used on the same days will permit a comparison of the data, and allow a valid conclusion to be drawn regarding its usefulness. Remember our count data is a sample of the migrant hawks. If the method of simultaneous counts, of mixed migrants and non-migrants, offers comparable

information regarding trends, then it might be the most objective way to get that data. Note that you might find this additional information too much to accomplish on a busy day. Remember that **the normal count of migrants has priority** if time is limiting. **Until this project is past a trial stage, all our trend data will be derived from the standard approach to counting these species**, so we must not neglect that.

### **Protocol for Simultaneous Counts**

1. For each hour record the maximum number of the species seen simultaneously, including both migrating and non-migrating individuals.
2. At the end of the day, select the largest of the hourly data for that species and enter on the right. Do not total the maximums. The result is the maximum seen at once during the whole day.

### **Completing the Daily Report Form**

On the Daily Report Form, **be sure to include the date, your name**, and the names of key observers for the day at the top of the sheet. If you are new to our watch, please also include your email or snail mail address. Send the form to me. This can be done by email (scanned copy or typed in), by snail mail (address on the form), or by completing an excel spreadsheet that is available on the web at: <http://www.battaly.com/hook/HMtemplate.xls> Alternatively, you may leave the form in the packet of materials on-site, and I will pick it up.

### **On-Site Monthly Sheet**

Most counters also enter the totals for the day on the on-site Monthly Sheet that is kept on the mountain top. This enables all visitors to the mountain to see how many hawks have come through.

Thank you for your help!

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