

Duluth News Tribune

Big day for birders: More than 21,000 hawks spotted at Hawk Ridge

Duluth News Tribune - 09/15/2008

The hawks are on the move.

More than 21,000 broad-winged hawks had passed over Hawk Ridge in east Duluth by mid-afternoon, according to Debbie Waters of the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory.

“We had 7,800 broadwings by 2 p.m., and we’ve had thousands and thousands since then,” she said.

The birds likely have been held up by recent rains and low pressure. Now that skies have cleared and winds are from the west, they are on the move. This is the biggest hawk day so far at Hawk Ridge this fall.

“You’ll have to get your binoculars and look for them,” Waters said. “They’re way up there.”

Broadwings use thermals of warm air that rise from the Duluth hillside to gain elevation. Often they appear as mere pepper specks against the sky. Finally, they peel out of the “kettles” — large spirals of hawks — to continue their southward migration.

Broadwings are the most numerous species of hawk to pass over Hawk Ridge each fall. The record broadwing day was — coincidentally — Sept. 15, 2003, when 101,698 hawks passed over hawk ridge. That day remains the record day at Hawk Ridge, when 102,329 hawks of several species passed the ridge.

Hawk Watching is free at Hawk Ridge, which is about one mile east of Glenwood Street on Skyline Parkway.