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Duluth's Spring Raptor Count returns after a year off

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By: **Sam Cook**, Duluth News Tribune

After a one-year layoff, Duluth's Spring Raptor Count has been restarted this year.

Counters stationed on West Skyline Parkway below Enger Park and on some days at Thompson Hill in far western Duluth keep track of eagles and other raptors moving north in their spring migration.

Through Wednesday, more than 1,200 bald eagles had been counted, according to the records of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, which conducts the count.

The count was not held last year and was done on a part-time basis in 2006 and 2007 because of budget issues, said Janelle Long, executive director of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory.

The count is important, Long says, because Duluth's spring count ranks among the top five of nearly 50 across North America in terms of birds counted. Citizen counters across the country help track trends in raptor populations.

Duluth's Frank Nicoletti started the Duluth spring count in 1997 and is assisting official counter Karl Bardon this spring. Nicoletti conducted the count through 2005, counting about 26,000 raptors each spring. He thinks it's important that the spring count continues.

"It's too important a site not to be doing a spring count," he said.

The spring count was re-established this year with grant money and from donations of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory members. The count runs from March 1 through the end of May.

Duluth's spring count holds the North American record for most bald eagles counted in a single day in a spring count — 822 on March 23, 2004. The count has the highest bald eagle and red-tailed hawk numbers in the nation, Long said, and ranks in the top five for golden eagles and ospreys. Nearly 3,000 bald eagles pass over Duluth each spring on their way north.

Next spring, Duluth will host the Hawk Migration Association of North America spring conference.

The public is welcome at the counting sites. When winds are southerly or westerly, go to the pullover on West Skyline Parkway just below Enger Park. On days with easterly winds, counters usually operate from the frontage road just below the Thompson Hill rest area along Interstate 35.

For more information on spring and fall hawk flights over Duluth, go to www.hawkridge.org.

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