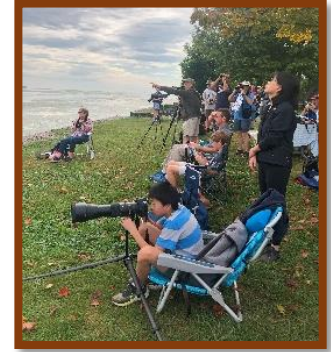


# Hawk Watching at the Hawk Fest at Lake Erie Metropark

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The Oakland Owlets' families and friends gathered at the Detroit River Hawk Watch site at Lake Erie Metropark on the morning of September 22. This location is an official count site of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). Counters watch fall hawk migration at this site beginning in September through November. The count site is near the boat launch in the park where the Detroit River empties into Lake Erie. Hawk migration data have been recorded at this location for decades. To learn more about this effort visit this link - [Count Data - Detroit River Hawk Watch](#).



Upon arriving we secured viewing spots near the river with lawn chairs positioned facing northeast. Birds are crossing the river migrating south from northern Ontario. Raptors select the shortest distance to cross bodies of water. Over water, thermal updrafts that raptors use to soar do not exist. Waiting for hawks to fly overhead is a large part of hawk watching.



Erika Van Kirk from the US Fish and Wildlife Service spoke to our group right away. Erika coordinates the Detroit River Hawk Watch (DRHW) site along with several other groups. Erika provided educational information about the site and the timing of the raptors migrating to anyone interested. The site is open to the public.

Oakland Owlet's families and friends were also able to meet Josh Haas. Josh is one of the lead educators for the Michigan Hawk Migration Teaching Network. Josh provided everyone with valuable information about hawk identification and migration. He has created hawk migration and identification guides and videos. Visit "[Hawk on the Wing](#)" website to learn more - [Home - Hawks on the Wing](#) Josh shared some personal insights from his field experiences as a hawk counter. While talking about hawks and hawk migration, Josh would pause to identify hawks moving overhead. By late morning, hawk migration had picked up. The Huron Valley Audubon Society planned a field trip for the same day. The Huron Valley Audubon group joined us.



Everyone had an opportunity to see Sharp-shinned Hawks on this field trip. Josh explained the distinct flight pattern of Sharp-shinned Hawks during migration. Josh referred to their wing beats as "snappy and quick." Everyone could see the quick choppy movement of their wings as we counted them flying across the river into Michigan. Mid-September is the peak



Sharp-shinned Hawk

time for Sharp-shinned hawks' migration. Sharpies are smaller hawks with long tails and short wings. Our group recorded 23 Sharp-shinned hawks during our visit, however, the total number reported for the day at this site was 238. The day of our visit was not ideal for hawk migration. Favorable weather for hawk migration involves cold fronts descending from the north with light northeasterly winds.

Other birds observed migrating over the site that morning included American Kestrel and Northern Harrier. We were able to see several American Kestrel and one Northern Harrier. In addition, to the migrating hawks, the count observers also noted flocks of Common Grackles and Blue Jays moving overhead. Many birds responding to the triggers of migration are on the move. Blue Jays are in our area year-round, yet some migrate. In addition to the raptors seen by the hawk counter, Owllet's families and friends also observed Bald Eagles and a Cooper's Hawk. Hawk counters do not record resident raptors at this location in their daily tallies.

Additionally, there was a lot of bird activity along the river as we waited to see the hawks. Several species of gulls were observed including Ring-billed, Herring and Bonaparte's Gulls. Waterfowl included Canada Geese and Mallards. We were also rewarded to see Forster's and Caspian Terns, Pied-billed Grebes and more. We heard songbirds calling nearby like American Goldfinch and Carolina Wren. Some of us walked the trail just before leaving and added a few new species. The group tracked 27 species during this field with over 127 individuals. The weather was pleasant even though it was not favorable to see many hawks migrating.



Caspian Tern



The Marshland Museum hosted a Hawk Fest over the weekend with multiple activities and learning experiences. Everyone was encouraged to visit the Hawk Fest after the field trip.

Thank you to everyone attending. A special thank you to **Josh Haas** for helping the Owllets learn about Hawks and **Erika Van Kirk** from the U.S.F&W Service. An eBird checklist for this field trip is available upon request.

**Photo credits:** Kathleen Dougherty & Oakland Bird Alliance.