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Golden Eagle Survey 2024

Final Report

On January 20, 2024, over 218 citizen scientist volunteers from the National Eagle Center spread out across the blufflands and forested areas of southeast Minnesota, western Wisconsin, eastern Iowa, northwestern Illinois, and, for the first time, new routes added in northern Arkansas and northern Kentucky for the 20th Annual Wintering Golden Eagle Survey. They were seeking Golden Eagles that winter in the region. With continued interest in the survey, we were able to add several new routes to the survey area. Many of these routes are areas where potential habitat exists for wintering Golden Eagles and we have wanted to survey for some time. It will take some time for the new surveyors to learn these new routes, but all information gleaned will be very valuable for the survey. The Center greatly appreciates all the time and energy all of these citizen scientists dedicated to this survey.

After two years with less than 100 Golden Eagles observed in 2023 and 2022, it felt good to have this year's survey numbers back over 100 with this year's final total of 115 Golden Eagles. Many observers thought numbers may have been lower this year due to this year's survey cold start with most areas near zero degrees Fahrenheit. This was followed by a very slow warm up throughout the day, making it hard to find raptors soaring. Only observers that were out late in the afternoon witnessed raptors in flight.

Bald Eagle numbers were once again way up and broke the record from 2015 of 1,888, setting a new record high for this year's survey at 2,607! Ninety-six percent of the routes observed Bald Eagles with several of the routes having over 200 Bald Eagles each. Some of these high Bald Eagle concentrations were near typical open water areas. However, even if we take away a total of 600 Bald Eagles from those open water areas, that still leaves us with 2,007 Bald Eagles that are wintering well away from open water sources in the forested farm land of our region during the winter months. This record high number just goes to show the remarkable recovery that the Bald Eagle has made away from the brink of extinction. Even with such high numbers it is still very important to conduct surveys such as this one to monitor the population and to continue to educate about the hazards that eagles still are facing such as lead poisoning and vehicle collisions, which is unfortunately just to name a few of the hazards.

Concerning numbers from this year's survey came from the number of Rough-legged Hawk sightings. The last three years survey numbers have been 213, 199 and 154 respectively, this year though the observations came in at a record low of 100. Region wide the numbers were way down with the only exception coming from one of our northernmost routes. This route that covers Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area in Burnett County in northern Wisconsin had 30 Rough-legged Hawks. Results were similar for American Kestrels which were less than half (65) of last year's count (140).

Do the lower numbers survey wide mean that there were issues on the breeding grounds on the Arctic Tundra preventing the hatching of Rough-legged Hawks? Or does this mean that with the milder winter that not as many Rough-legged Hawks moved as far south as in a typical winter? To learn more, we will have to continue to investigate and to also remember that surveys such as ours are just a snapshot, and to get a good sense of trends, you need to look at the numbers and trends over many years, so with your assistance, we will continue to do so.

Over the next few months be sure to check out the Golden Eagle section on the National Eagle Center's website as more data and information will be added including trends over the years for each survey area and information from our satellite tracked Golden Eagles. Remember to let your birding friends know that we are still expanding our survey areas and that if they are interested in helping out, have them send an email expressing interest to **golden@nationaleaglecenter.org**.

-Scott Mehus

Golden Eagle Survey Coordinator

Overview

Citizen Scientist Observers: 218
Survey Routes: 92
States Covered: 6 (MN, WI, IA, IL, AR, KY)
Counties: 57
Total Surveying Hours: 728 **Total Miles Driven:** 10,010

Total Golden Eagles Observed	
2024	115
2023	83
2022	99
2021	126
2020	119

Golden Eagles (Adult : Juvenile)	
2024	67% / 33%
2023	66% / 34%
2022	67% / 33%
2021	75% / 25%
2020	77% / 23%

Total Bald Eagles Observed	
2024	2,607
2023	1,737
2022	1,643
2021	1,433
2020	1,403

2024 Most Active Routes (Bald Eagles)		
IL 03	Carroll County	310
MN 06	Winona County	231
WI 12	Buffalo County	203
MN 22	Anoka County	200
IA 08	Dubuque / Jackson	180

Unidentified Eagles	
2024	150
2023	49
2022	86
2021	93

2024 Most Active Routes (Golden Eagles)		
WI 05	Buffalo County	6
WI 06	Buffalo County	6
WI 02	Buffalo County	5
WI 14	Buffalo County	5
WI 33	Richland/Sauk County	5
IA 7	Winneshiek County	5
MN 13	Houston/Winona County	4
WI 04	Buffalo County	4
WI 12	Buffalo County	4
WI 20	Pierce County	4
WI 24	LaCrosse/Vernon County	4
WI 31	Grant County	4

Bald Eagles (Adult : Juvenile)	
2024	74% / 26%
2023	78% / 22%
2022	74% / 26%
2021	72% / 28%
2020	78% / 22%

2023 Most Active Routes (Bald Eagles)		
IA 08	Jackson County	141
WI 18	Trempealeau County	110
WI 06	Buffalo County	79
IL 03	Carroll/Jo Daviess/Whiteside	78
WI 25	Vernon County	54

% Routes Reporting 1 or More:	
Golden Eagles	50%
Bald Eagles	96%
Red-Tailed Hawks	91%
Rough-Legged Hawks	40%

Hawks

Total Red-Tailed Hawks Observed	
2024	582
2023	609
2022	866
2021	480
2020	461

2024 Most Active Routes (Red-Tailed Hawks)		
WI 25	Vernon County	26
WI 24	LaCrosse/Vernon County	24
WI 33	Richland/Sauk County	19
IA 03	Allamakee/Clayton County	16
WI 12	Buffalo County	15

2023 Most Active Routes (Red-Tailed Hawks)		
WI 33	Richland/Sauk	32
WI 25	Vernon County	22
WI 24	Vernon/LaCrosse/Monroe	21
WI 30	Grant County	19
IA 03	Clayton/Allamakee	18

Total Red-Shouldered Hawks Observed	
2024	0
2023	2
2022	1
2021	0
2020	1

Total Rough-Legged Hawks Observed	
2024	100
2023	213
2022	199
2021	154
2020	127

2023 Most Active Routes (Rough-Legged)		
MN 11	Houston County	15
MN 12	Houston County	12
WI 25	Vernon County	11
WI 33	Richland/Sauk	11
IA 07	Allamakee/Winneshiek	8
WI 26	Crawford/Vernon	8
WI 27	Crawford County	8

2024 Most Active Routes (Rough-Legged)		
WI 48	Burnett County	30
MN 22	Anoka County	6
IA 01	Allamakee County	6
WI 34W	Iowa County	5
WI 34E	Iowa County	4

Total Sharp-Shinned Hawks Observed	
2024	4
2023	7
2022	8
2021	5
2020	1

Total Cooper's Hawks Observed	
2024	11
2023	21
2022	16
2021	10
2020	10

Falcons

Total American Kestrels Observed	
2024	65
2023	140
2022	111
2021	154
2020	89

Total Merlins Observed	
2024	4
2023	3
2022	5
2021	1
2020	3

2024 Most Active Routes (American Kestrels)		
WI 30	Grant County	5
WI 16	Trempealeau County	3
WI 28	Crawford/Richland Co.	3
WI 34W	Iowa County	3
WI 47	Sauk County	3

Total Northern Harriers Observed	
2024	10
2023	15
2022	6
2021	8
2020	6

2023 Most Active Routes (American Kestrels)		
WI 33	Richland/Sauk	11
WI 25	Vernon County	11
WI 50	Sauk County	7
WI 29	Richland/Vernon	6
IA 08/WI 30	Jackson/Grant	6

Shrikes

Total Northern Shrikes Observed	
2024	17
2023	10
2022	6
2021	13
2020	23

Other Noted Species

American Crow	House Finch
American Goldfinch	House Sparrow
American Tree Sparrow	Killdeer
American White Pelican (4)	Lapland Longspur
Barred Owl (4)	Mallard
Belted Kingfisher	Mourning Dove
Black-Capped Chickadee	Northern Cardinal
Blue Jay	Northern Flicker
Brown Creeper	Pileated Woodpecker
Brown-headed Cowbird	Purple Finch
Canada Goose	Red-Bellied Woodpecker
Cedar Waxwing	Red-Headed Woodpecker
Common Goldeneye	Red-Winged Blackbird
Common Grackle	Ring-Necked Pheasant
Common Raven	Rock Pigeon
Common Redpoll	Ruffed Grouse
Dark-Eyed Junco	Rusty Blackbird (<i>new to survey</i>)
Downy Woodpecker	Sharp-Tailed Grouse (24) (<i>new to survey</i>)
Eastern Bluebird	Snow Bunting
Eastern Screech Owl	Song Sparrow
Eurasian Collared Dove	Trumpeter Swan
Green-winged Teal	Tundra Swan
Hairy Woodpecker	Wild Turkey (1099) (<i>record high</i>)
Hermit Thrush (1)	White-Breasted Nuthatch
Horned Lark	Wilson's Snipe (14) (<i>record high</i>)

Non-Bird Species

Coyote	White-tailed Deer
Raccoon	Squirrel (Fox, Gray, Red)
Red Fox	Virginia Opossum