

College Creek Hawkwatch 2025

by Brian Taber



Brian Taber, Bill Williams, Deborah Humphries and Nancy Barnhart on a February morning at College Creek. They tallied 53 total species this day while getting a head start on the spring hawkwatch season.

This was the 29th consecutive late winter and spring season of the [College Creek Hawkwatch](#), located on the James River, three miles southeast of Williamsburg, conducted by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. It's the only late winter and spring hawkwatch annually run in Virginia. It was conducted from February 18 through June 3. The hawkwatch completed 90 days (second highest) and 272.25 hours (second highest), again, excellent coverage. After a fast start, the flights greatly diminished. The total of 2,503 is the fourth highest. Due to an illness, I compiled less data than usual, so some charts won't be produced.

The species total was 12, a bit below the average of 14.

The protocol remained the same as in the previous 28 seasons: a daily watch was conducted, weather permitting, between about 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., Eastern Standard Time. This is the period when hawks and vultures typically cross the river, apparently taking advantage of the air warming in the morning. Attempts to see birds crossing

earlier and later in the day have not been met with success. Also, these mostly morning counts regularly tend to show these flights both beginning and ending, usually with a bell-shaped curve. All hawks and vultures crossing the river headed north were tallied. There were few big days, the biggest were 166 on March 11 and 126 on March 15, at the peak of the season.

Species Accounts including all 29 years:

Black Vulture | 42; second lowest since 2011

Turkey Vulture | 2,056; fourth highest and accounted for 82% of the total

Osprey | 103; third lowest since 2003. Before that, coverage and totals were much less; no explanation for the apparent decrease

Bald Eagle | 154; second highest

Northern Harrier | 15; third lowest ever

Sharp-shinned Hawk | 27; fifth lowest, continuing a slow recent trend

Cooper's Hawk | 23; sixth highest

Broad-winged Hawk | 4; sixteenth highest, though they are rare at this site

Red-tailed Hawk | 41 were the eighth highest and second best since 2014

American Kestrel | 21 were the second-highest since 2012; it's a species of concern across the east

Merlin | 1 was the lowest since 2005, though they are rare at this site



Red-tailed Hawk giving photographer, Deborah Humphries, quite the eye! Taken March 18 at College Creek Hawkwatch!

Monthly Totals: February was 268 over 9 days; March was 1478 over 30 days; April was 630 over 28 days and May was 118 over 22 days, the second lowest May since 2001. There was one June day. Clearly, March propelled the season with 60% of the total.

Birds per hour by month: February was 10.5; March was 14.2; April was 7 and May was 2.3.

Birds per hour for the season was 12.

The **1,000th bird of the season**, a milestone we track, was seen on March 15, the second earliest date for that mark.

Adult **Bald Eagles** were regularly seen overhead and over Kingsmill and Hog Island, presumably breeding birds, which again caused us to be very conservative...no adults were recorded as migrating.

The **non-raptor highlights** included:

- Two **Sandhill Cranes** on April 10
- **American White Pelicans**, often more than 50, on many dates
- **Tundra Swan** flyovers on several dates

- Apparent “**Nelson’s**” **Gull**, hybrid American Herring X Glaucous, on April 22 and May 11
- **Anhinga** over Hog Island on March 26
- Our friends at Ft. Smallwood Hawkwatch, near Baltimore, regularly see big **Blue Jay** flights in the spring, while our site has recorded none. However, this year, four crossed the river on April 19, when Barnhart estimated 200 crossing on April 22 and 40 on April 23!

The 2025 daily totals were entered into the database at Hawkcount.org, which also sends the data to eBird.

There were visitors on many days from several states and countries. We handed out brochures and answered their questions. Posts were again made regularly to the VA List Serve and on the CVWO eNewsletter. Many thanks to dedicated regular volunteers Bill Williams, Nancy Barnhart and Deborah Humphries for coverage.

On April 30, Barnhart, Humphries and Taber participated in the birding competition called the Virginia Birding Classic, sponsored by the VA Department of Wildlife Resources, in the Big Sit category at the hawkwatch. The 71 species by the “Riverbank Swallows” were good enough for first place in that category!