

MIGRATION TRAPPING OF HAWKS (AND OWLS)  
AT CAPE MAY, N.J. - THIRD YEAR  
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This article reports the results of the third year of Raptor banding at Cape May Point, New Jersey. (See Clark, 1968, 1969, for the first two years results.)

Throughout I shall use the more esthetic and appropriate names of Kestrel for Sparrow Hawk, Merlin for Pigeon Hawk, and Peregrine Falcon for Duck Hawk. The two latter falcons are subspecies of European species having the preferred names, while the former is more closely related to Falco tinnunculus, the European Kestrel, than to Accipiter nisus, the Sparrow Hawk, for which it was misnamed. It is indeed a shame that the recommendation of Peterson in his famous Field Guide has gone so long unheeded by those responsible for the common names of our birds.

The Trapping Station. Because the trapping method employed for flying hawks is much different from the mist net setup so many of us are familiar with, the following description of the Raptor trapping station is included.

The station is located at Cape May Point, within sight of the lighthouse, on the western side of a plowed field which is about fifty yards wide. (See Figure 1.) A blind is used to prevent the hawks from seeing the trapper. It faces east and is about ten yards from the edge of the field. The primary lure for the flying hawks is a live pigeon harnessed in a leather jacket. Attached to the jacket are two lines, one of which comes to the blind after going through a bow trap, (See Figure 2) and the other returns to the blind after passing through two guides located at the top and bottom of the lure pole. The two lure lines are joined at the blind. This arrangement allows the trapper to "fly" the pigeon when a hawk is seen in the air by pulling on lure line 1. (The pigeon in this rig appears injured to the hawk, and his predatory instinct is aroused.)

If the hawk decides to attack or "stoop" on the pigeon, it is brought back to the center of the bow trap by pulling on lure line 2. Should the hawk continue his stoop and bind to the pigeon, it is captured by setting off the bow trap, that is, by pulling the trigger line from the blind. The trapper then leaves the blind to retrieve the captured hawk. However many hawks do not bind, but only zip across the lure. In order to catch these hawks, two large mist nets are placed behind the bow trap, one atop the other. This gives coverage from the height of fourteen feet down to just above the ground, with sufficient bag to take hawks up to the size of a Red-tailed Hawk.

In addition to the above bow trap, a pair of smaller bow traps, baited with House Sparrows, are used. The sparrows are also encased in leather jackets with the two lure lines as described above. The sparrows are flown when the stooping hawk is a species too small to bind to the pigeon. However hawks are first lured with the pigeon to bring them in close enough to see the sparrow motion. One of these smaller bow traps is placed on either side of the large one.

Many hawks are wary and do not come in completely in their stoop, but end up perched in the nearby trees, on the mist net poles, or on the lure poles. In order to catch some of these, two Ver-Bail pole traps are placed out into the field.

Trapping Results. Table 1 reports the daily catch of hawks trapped and banded at the station. It also gives the wind direction and velocity, the operator of the station, and number of hours the station was operated.

The station was operated all but three days during the six week period from September 20 through November 1, 1969. One day was due to rain (and lack of light) and the other two to lack of an operator.

In addition to the results shown in table 1, 49 Kestrels were road trapped locally by the author using Bal-Chatrri traps baited with House Mice and House Sparrows. Two Great Horned Owls, probably the resident pair, were trapped early in the season on a large Bal-Chatrri with a pigeon as bait. It was left overnight in the field in front of the station. Two Barn owls were also trapped at night, one in the mist net, which was left up for this purpose overnight. And the other on one of the Ver-Bail pole traps.

Table 2 is a breakdown of the number of hawks of each species caught by the various traps.

Table 3 is a daily summary of hawk "passes" at the station. A pass is counted when the flying hawk leaves its intended flight path and approaches the immediate station area in a stoop.

Table 4 gives a daily summary of all hawks identified from the station and includes all hawks that are caught or made passes. (Or that were missed due to equipment malfunction or operator error. These data were kept, but only for improvement in the catch at the station.)

The station was operated for a considerably longer period in 1969 than the previous two falls, thanks to the cooperation of other banders interested in this Raptor banding project. These cooperators, in alphabetic order, are: Larry Hood, Jerry Mersereau, Bob and Elizabeth Teuling, and Ted and Dee VanVelzen.

The most significant differences in 1969 results as compared to the two previous years are the increase in number of Sharp-shinned Hawks banded, the increase in number of species trapped, the lack of Peregrine Falcons, and a slight drop in hawks trapped per hour of station operation. The first two mentioned differences were probably due to operating the station later into the season. The paucity of Peregrines I do not attempt to explain, but we all know that they are an endangered species and what is certainly the major factor in their decline. The decrease in hawks trapped per station hour from 1968 is no doubt due to the inexperience and unfamiliarity of the other operators with the trapping station, (at times one needs three sets of arms and eyes to operate the setup properly.) more overcast drizzly days with little or no hawk flights, and operating the station late into October, when the number of smaller hawks, which make up the bulk of our catch, is less.

Another interesting difference this year was that more adult Kestrels, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and Merlins were caught. Again operating the station later in the season was the responsible factor. And was extremely useful to the author in his study of ageing and sexing the small falcons.

Interesting Experiences. Operating a Raptor banding station is a very satisfying Passtime, and is fun. Unusual occurrences are a part of the fun. Some of the more interesting are described below.

In last year's article I reported that Larry Hood was holding one net pole when a Sharp-Shinned Hawk flew into the net. This year Larry and I were standing out in the field looking over one of the Ver-Bail pole traps when another sharpie flew by us and attached one of the sparrows. Larry, reacting quickly, chased it into the mist net, proving again his ability to catch this species without use of the blind. (But Jerry M. reported that he also caught one while he and Sammy C. were outside the blind.)

Early in the season a trio of photographers, who were filming wild-life, especially birds, for a TV documentary based on Edwin Way Teale's "Seasons" quartet, visited the station for the better part of two days. The movie cameraman, a Japanese nicknamed by his American friends "Kobi", took some excellent footage of hawks stooping on the lure birds and their subsequent capture. The flight on these two days was very light and only by his extreme patience and excellence in camouflage was he able to get these shots. At times he was less than ten feet from one of the bow traps. He also shot footage of the author processing and banding some hawks, complete with tape recorded sound track, and a zoom-in on the "BAN DDT" sticker attached to the rear of the author's Scout. And this winter a film editor visited the author for another hour's worth of sound track on hawk trapping and conservation. (unfortunately for us in the States, the documentaries are being made for Canadian Television. However they may be shown later in the U.S. on a local basis.)

The station had many visitors, two of whom deserve comment. The first was the ageless Ira Gabrielson, who spent an hour at the station and was there when the first adult male Merlin for the station was trapped. Next was the visit of Jane Church, an active EBBA member. She came for the day and it was a good flight day. But she started off the day by being in the wrong place when I pulled on lure line 1 for the pigeon, which requires a long pull. I rapped her a good one on the leg. Later, after trapping a hawk, in the rush to leave the blind, I stumbled over Jane, who was sprawled in front of the blind door looking out the rear window. And at the end of the day when the birds were being processed, Jane put her hand down on my cigarette. Her comment as she left for home was that she had never been bruised, stepped on, and burned by anyone in one day and yet enjoyed that day; would I invite her to bisit the station again.

Lastly, an immature female Sharp-Shinned Hawk banded on September 23, 1969 was retrapped by George Hitchner's Operation Recovery station, a quarter of a mile away, on September 27. The winds during this four day period were south and south-west.

Future Plans. Next fall, 1970, an even longer trapping season is planned, beginning Labor day weekend and continuing until the end of October. But the most significant change will be in moving the station 200 yards to the south to be more in the major flight path of the hawks. This will also afford a better view for the station operator. In addition, Dho-Ghaza nets, lighter mist nets, and more Ver-Bail pole traps will be utilized. During October it is planned to use thrush size mist nets for Saw Whet and other species of owls.

The assistance of the following persons at the station was greatly appreciated by the operators: Sammy Chevalier, Pete Davis, Gil and Jo Fernandez, Greg Ivans, and Don Lehman. And again, special thanks to George Hitchner for many details, including some warning signs, which aided in keeping uninvited visitors away from the station during trapping hours.

The accompanying photographs were taken during this fall's trapping at the station.

5751 Sanger Ave., Apt. 231, Alexandria, Va. 22311

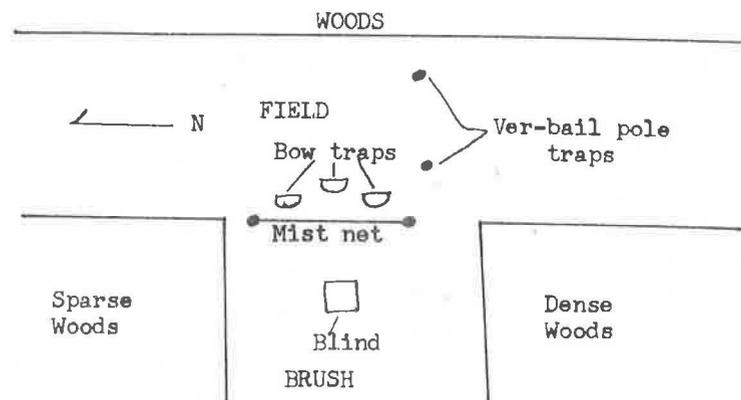
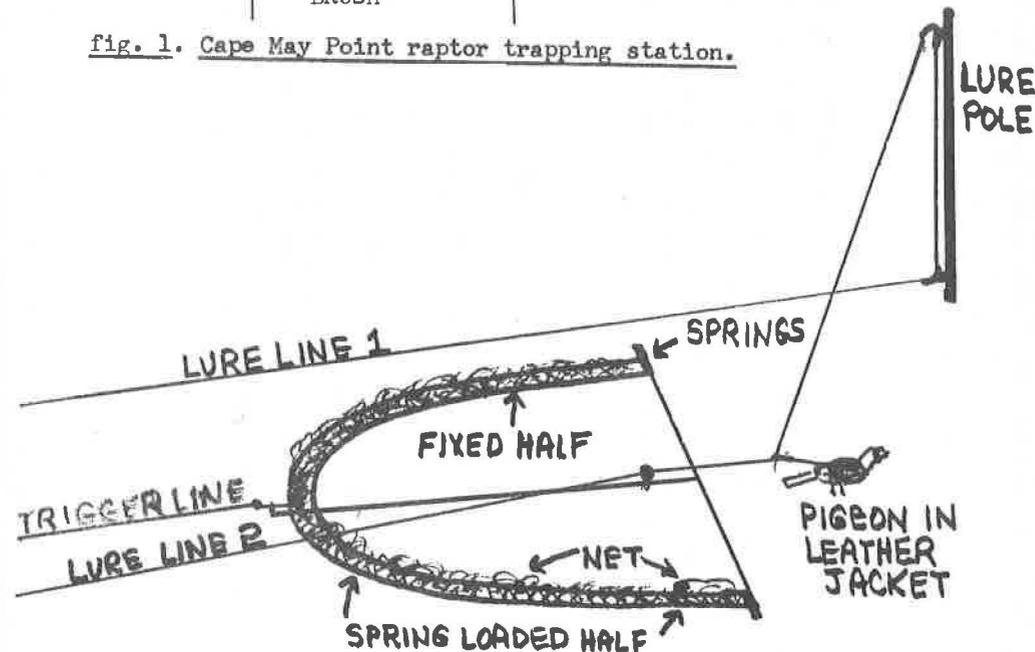


fig. 1. Cape May Point raptor trapping station.



PIGEON "FLOWN" BY PULLING LURE LINE 1  
 PIGEON "HOMED" BY PULLING LURE LINE 2

Fig. 2. Bow Trap detail

	13	14	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
*Kestrel(Sparrow H.)	4	3	5	3	9	6	1	1	3	5	17	14	6	3	1										7
*Merlin(Pigeon Hawk)					1	1	1	1		1	1	1													4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1		1	1	2	3			6	2	4	2	1	5	2										1
Cooper's Hawk															1	1									1
Broad-winged Hawk	1																								1
Red Shouldered Hawk																									1
Red Tailed Hawk																									1
Daily Total	5	4	6	5	12	9	4	2	3	12	20	18	9	4	6	3	1	0	0	**	0	1	**	0	13
Aver. Wind direction	W	NE	E	NE	E	W	SW	NW	NE	SE	SW	SE	SW	NE	calm										NE
Aver. Wind velocity	5	5	15	10	5	5	5	5	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	15	15	0							10
Station Hours	43	6	75	62	85	7	55	4	75	65	93	85	75	62	4	7	86	5	4						45
Operator	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	V	V	V						C

*Kestrel(Sparrow H.)	4	7	1	8	2	1	3		2	4	1	1	1	1											123
*Merlin(Pigeon Hawk)			3			1															2				17
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	12	6	15	6	7	4	5	9	3	2	8	1	1											112
Cooper's Hawk		1																							7
Broad-winged Hawk		2							1																2
Red Shouldered Hawk			2																						4
Red Tailed Hawk						1																			4
Daily Total	6	**	22	7	26	11	8	4	6	0	15	3	0	4	13	3	1	2	1	2					271#
Aver. Wind direction	NE	SE	NW	NE	W	SW	NW	NW	W	W	SW	NW	N	NE	E	E	SE								SE
Aver. Wind velocity	10	5	15	5	5	10	15	20	15	5	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	15				15
Station Hours	6	9	82	85	82	8	9	9	95	9	9	7	75	8	85	75	8	8	8	8					303.5
Operator	C	C	C	C	C	C	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M					C

TABLE 1. STATION DAILY TRAPPING RESULTS

\*\* not in operation  
 # In addition, 40 Kestrels were trapped locally from car, using Bal-Chatri traps and 2 Great Horned and 2 Barn Owls were trapped at the station during the night.

Operator Key: C - Clark; H - Hood; M - Mersereau; T - Teuling; V - Van Velzen

Table 2. Trapping result by method

	Small Bows	Large Bow	Mist net	Ver-bail	Poletrap
*Kestrel(Sparrow H.)	102		19	2	
*Merlin(Pigeon Hawk)	4		12	1	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	48		64		
Cooper's Hawk	1	1	5		
Broad-winged Hawk	1		1		
Red Shouldered Hawk	1	1	2		
Red Tailed Hawk		4	2		
Total	157	6	105	3	

\*Preferred name

(below) Table 3. DAILY SUMMARY OF HAWK PASSES AT THE STATION

Species	13	14	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
*Kestrel(Sparrow H.)	7	17	7	10	35	19	6	2	12	8	16	13	5	4	1	5	1				n	n			9
*Merlin(Pigeon Hawk)	1	10	4							3	5	3			1						o	o			7
*Peregrine Falcon (Duck Hawk)										1	1										t				
Sharp-shinned Hawk			1	6	5	1	3	1	5	1	1	2	10								o	1			5
Cooper's Hawk				1	1				1		1			1	1						p	6			3
Broad-winged Hawk	1																				e	1			
Red Shouldered Hawk																					r				
Red Tailed Hawk																									
Marsh Hawk																									
Daily Total	8	18	7	21	47	25	6	3	15	14	25	21	12	5	2	13	7	1	0	1	7	1	7	1	24

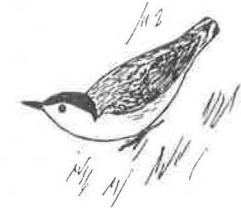
(continued)

Species	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	01	Total
*Kestrel	1	n	6	1	15	2			2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	211
*Merlin	1	o			3				1	1										40
*Peregrine Falcon																				2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5	26	7	13	4	1	5	8	11	5	2	2	4	1						136
Cooper's Hawk	1	o	1	3	2			1	2	1										26
Broad-winged Hawk																				2
Red Shouldered Hawk																				2
Red Tailed Hawk																				14
Marsh Hawk																				20
Daily Total	8	35	8	35	11	2	6	15	14	19	3	1	2	4	5	0	1	1	1	453

Table 4. DAILY SUMMARY OF HAWKS SEEN AT THE STATION (\* Preferred name)

Species	13	14	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
*Kestrel (Sparrow H.)	31	53	48	120	121	90	33	14	64	62	113	63	41	22	10	12	41	23	2	n	3	n	1	1	162
*Merlin (Pigeon Hawk)	1	10	7	3				6	7	3	4			1	2	2	2	1	0			o		16	
*Peregrine Falcon					1	1		1														1			t
(Duck Hawk)																									
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	5	55	49	54	30	36	35	45	34	28	14	46	16	50	24	6	5	0	3	12	o	7	102	
Cooper's Hawk	1	1	2	2	4	9	4	7	3	2	6	9	4	10	4	1	0	1	14	p	5	12			
Broad-winged Hawk	3	1	1	14	9	6	27	16	4	37	18	63	6	37	30	e	43							5	
Red Shouldered Hawk																								1	
Red Tailed Hawk			1	1	2	1	1	6	4	3														1	
Rough-legged Hawk																								1	
Marsh Hawk	2	1	1	1	2	1	4	5	5	7	5	2	4	6	e	d								3	
Osprey	1	2	4	1	1		4	4	1	2	2	1	10	4										2	
Golden Eagle																									
Turkey Vulture																								1	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>13305</b>	
(continued)	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	01	Total				
*Kestrel	27	n	43	4	50	12	10	7	92	130	30	2	13	13	17	8	1	4	3	1	1596				
*Merlin	4	o	1	11					1	6	3	6	1							2	100				
*Peregrine Falcon	66	14	148	76	114	67	100	154	101	242	15	9	35	71	72	10	29	14	4	2025					
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	o	6	7	7	3	2	3	7	3	2									144					
Cooper's Hawk			5																	330					
Broad-winged Hawk			6						2	2	1	2								16					
Red Shouldered Hawk			5		25	32			73	33	12	14	20	15	10	1				275					
Red Tailed Hawk			2	1	3	2	9	4	3	27	13	25	6	6	8	3	1	1	3	4	2				
Rough-legged Hawk																				1					
Marsh Hawk																				41					
Osprey																				1					
Golden Eagle																				1					
Turkey Vulture																				1035					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>22</b>															
<b>Totals</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5749</b>														

(Please note: Dates given in Tables 1, 3 and 4 are 13 September thru 1 November)



left: Author processing male Kestrel.



upper right: Barn Owl caught in net left overnight.



lower right: Adult Sharp-shinned Hawk entangled in net.