

GENERAL NOTES

Spectacular hawk flight at Cape May Point, New Jersey on 16 October 1970.—

After the passage of a moderate cold front through Cape May on 4, 5, and 6 October, 1970; the center of high pressure responsible for it lingered off the coast till 15 October. This caused for nine days a flow of air from a generally southern and eastern direction whose western boundary extended along a stationary front from the Gulf near New Orleans in a northeastern direction west of the Alleghenies and along the St. Lawrence to its Gulf. It is possible that these continuous southerly winds acted as a temporary brake on the fall bird migration. A high pressure center moving south from Canada centered about Kansas on 14 October. Its northwestern winds extended to the Alleghenies on a front that reached from the St. Lawrence valley almost to the Gulf of Mexico. As it moved eastward this wide swath of strong northwestern wind swept large numbers of migrating birds toward the coast. About 15:00 on 15 October, the arrival of this front in the Cape May area was heralded by thunderstorms and heavy rain which continued throughout the night until about 09:00 the next morning, tapering off in intermittent showers about 11:00. The northwest wind, which registered 25 to 30 miles per hour with occasional gusts up to 50 on a local wind gauge, continued throughout the day.

About 08:30 I was alerted by a neighbor, J. d'Arcy Northwood, to the fact that despite the driving rain many hawks were on the wing. So I made my way about a quarter-mile to the Cape May Point State Park, where I met Alfred Nicholson at 09:00. We took up a station about 100 yards east of the lighthouse, which gave us an unobstructed view to the north and east over the marshes, to the south over the beach and the ocean, and an open area to the west for 100 yards with low trees and small buildings in the background. Flying in a westerly direction as they came down the coast in a wide swath, the hawks veered toward the north as they approached the tip of the Cape May peninsula.

Our first problem was to come up with a means of approximating the number of Sparrow Hawks (*Falco sparverius*) rapidly passing by. We finally decided that using the lighthouse as a reference point, as though it were 12 on a watch lying horizontally in front of us, we would together scan the area using our binoculars in a clockwise direction from 12 through 1, 2 and 3 back to 12, the lighthouse. After several trials we arrived at an estimate of 100 birds seen in one sweep around. We then calculated that it took about one minute for the 100 in sight at a given moment to be replaced by a succeeding 100. We checked this method of counting several times in the course of the morning and arrived at approximately the same figures. The flight continued with undiminished intensity for three hours giving us about 6000 Sparrow Hawks per hour until noon. Then the numbers dropped to about 65 per minute making it about 4000 in the hour from 12:00 to 13:00. Numbers continued to drop as we recorded 2000 hawks from 13:00 to 14:00, 700 from 14:00 to 15:00, 100 from 15:00 to 16:00, and 75 from 16:00 to 17:00. The total for the day was about 25,000 Sparrow Hawks.

A second problem was to assure ourselves that birds were not circling after they left the Point and passing us a second time. To check on this Alfred Nicholson went about noon to the Higbee Beach area two miles north of Cape May Point on the Delaware Bay. He found that the flight continued up the bay shore with all birds flying northward although in lesser numbers than at the Point. An hour or so later to check the intervening area I went north on the Bay Shore Road for about two miles. This road parallels the bay shore about a mile inland. Quite a few birds were seen to the west of the road and only 10 on its east side. All were flying toward the north. This made it evident that the flight was continuous with no repetitions.

So engrossed were we with the numbers of Sparrow Hawks that the recording of only three Pigeon Hawks (*F. columbarius*) suggests that some of this species were overlooked. Other hawks recorded were: Sharp-shinned (*Accipiter striatus*) 613, Cooper's (*A. cooperii*) 6, Red-tailed (*Buteo jamaicensis*) 7, Red-shouldered (*B. lineatus*) 4, Marsh (*Circus cyaneus*) 82, Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) 14, and Peregrine (*F. peregrinus*) 4. Our total for the day was approximately 25,600. This estimate is conservative particularly in view of the fact that birds flying before 09:00 are not included.

We also noted four Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*), 15 flocks of Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) with 50 to 250 in each flock, several flocks of Robins (*Turdus migratorius*), one of about a thousand birds in such a compact mass that it seemed to bounce along in a gusty wind like a ball, a flock of 13 Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), and overwhelming numbers of small passerines mostly sparrows and warblers.—ERNEST A. CHOATE, *Cape May Point, New Jersey 08212, 20 December 1971.*

Osprey carrying a mammal.—During our investigation of the Peace River near its confluence with Branch Creek in Hardee County, Florida, on 6 January 1972 at 14:00, we were surprised to observe an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) unmistakably carrying a mammal in its talons. The mammal was approximately the size of a squirrel or small rabbit. The bird flew over at a height of 30 feet about 75–100 feet downstream from our position. It paralleled the river for a short distance before disappearing into the bordering woods.

Ospreys are known to be almost exclusively piscivorous, but occasionally are reported to take crustaceans, amphibians, and birds (Brown and Amadon, *Eagles, hawks and falcons of the World*, Vol. 1, p. 198, 1968). Bent (*Life histories of North American birds of prey*, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull., 167:368–369, 1938) mentions that Ospreys have been known to take beetles and reptiles on rare occasions. Sindelar and Schluter (*Wilson Bull.*, 80:103, 1968) reported an Osprey carrying what was believed to be a Cardinal (*Richmondia cardinalis*).

We assume this occurrence occurred as a direct result of a large phosphate slime spill entering the Peace River from a detention pond that burst on 3 December 1971. Over 90 per cent (Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission sample estimate) of the resident fish were killed by the choking slime. The spill may have forced the Osprey to turn to other prey items for sustenance—in this case the mammal.—WILLIAM W. TAIR, H. MALCOLM JOHNSON, AND WILLIAM D. COURSER, *Southwest Florida Water Management District, Post Office Box 457, Brooksville, Florida 33512, 28 January 1972.*

The migration of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper through Surinam.—The migration of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*) through continental South America, to and from its winterquarters in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina is but poorly known. According to my cooperator Mr. Th. Renssen, who lived for some time at the sugar estate Marienburg (Commewijne Dist.), Surinam and whom I thank for sending me the specimens mentioned below, it is a regular but not numerous migrant both in the northern fall and spring. It favors open ground with a very low vegetation but especially recently harvested and burnt over sugar cane fields. This same habitat is frequented by the American Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) and the Upland Plover (*Barrhamia longicauda*) and the Buff-breasted Sandpiper is often in company with these two species. The earliest date during the fall migration is 15 August 1969 (sight) and birds were collected (all in the Leiden Museum) on 20 September 1966 (male, weight