

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory
MOU Savaloja Grant
2015 Final Report

The MOU Savaloja Grant of \$625 helped fund the first Hawk Ridge Count Trainee. The traineeship provided a unique and rewarding professional training opportunity. Kaija Gahm was selected out of approximately 10 candidates and accepted the 2015 Hawk Ridge Count Traineeship. Candidates were interviewed and references were checked prior to the selection by the Executive Director and Count Director. Kaija is an enthusiastic and accomplished young woman who is taking a "gap year" between high school and going off to college at Yale and was a great fit for the traineeship. Kaija learned the skills to conduct migration monitoring research, such as identification of birds by both sight and sound for raptors and non-raptors, data collection, data entry, public relations with visitors, and other valuable research tools.

Fall 2015 was a stellar year for the count at Hawk Ridge for both raptors and non-raptors with over a half million birds total counted and many new record high counts! There's no doubt that Kaija helped contribute to achieving those numbers, such as a day of 90,000+ songbirds on September 1st. Hawk Ridge Count Director, Karl Bardon, stated "Kaija's help was invaluable" and asked if we will be able to have a Count Trainee again for fall of 2016. It was a win-win experience for both the trainee and the organization, as we had hoped. Here's Kaija's final reflection from this fall season, which solidifies the accomplishments of the traineeship program:

"When I began my traineeship at Hawk Ridge, I knew that I loved birds and that I wanted to learn more about them. That was it—I had no hawk watching experience, and I didn't really understand what it meant to be part of an organization like Hawk Ridge. I learned that and more; my traineeship taught me how to count migrating hawks, how to understand hawk migration, and how to understand the hawks themselves.

I find joy in watching birds, both in observing individuals and in appreciating their broader ecological roles. Standing on the count platform at Hawk Ridge was an interesting marriage of these two types of observation. On the one hand, in order to properly identify the birds (and therefore to accurately count them), a counter must have a deep understanding of the characteristics of each species of hawk, and also of the individual variation within the species. As important as it was to know that Rough-legged Hawks often soar in a modified dihedral and Bald Eagles hold their wings flat, it was equally critical not to be bound by those rules, and to be able to appreciate, for example, the one adult Bald Eagle that flew by with a strange upward twist in its wing. As I studied the hawks and learned to identify them, the variations in the individual birds served as a reminder that each one was a raptor, a predator, more than just a digit on the clicker.

But at the same time, the large numbers of birds we observed in migration made it impossible to consider only individuals. This traineeship reinforced in my mind the ecological importance of raptors. I know that each bird is a key part of the food web in its habitat, and there were so many birds, so many interconnected food webs. It was humbling to stand in one place and witness the passage of these thousands of hawks, which would help to maintain the health of ecosystems across the continent, from Minnesota to Brazil.

During my traineeship, I met and interacted with many people who understand the importance of birds and who have devoted their careers or their lives to studying and protecting them. The Hawk Ridge education staff, the passerine and raptor banders, and my fellow counters have, by their example, encouraged me to continue learning about birds. They also showed me that working with birds is inherently a collaborative effort.

A count like the one at Hawk Ridge seeks only to document migration, not to control it or even immediately understand it. Yet by collecting as much information as possible on the migration of raptors and songbirds, Hawk Ridge is helping to ensure that there will be a strong scientific record for researchers to use in years to come. I don't know what future discoveries may rest on the birds that I helped to count this season, but the sense of potential in each day's count is what made this season so rewarding for me. I am glad that I got to be a part of Hawk Ridge this year, and in doing so, that I contributed to something infinitely bigger."

Lastly, Kaija also completed a special project of compiling both Hawk Ridge non-raptor count records by family and notable non-raptor counts by date from the last 9 fall seasons. This information will be used for educational and news purposes.

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory sincerely thanks M.O.U. for helping fund the Count Traineeship. This season's success with the traineeship gives us more confidence that this program will benefit our understanding of birds by providing the professional training necessary to conduct sound migration monitoring research for not only Hawk Ridge, but other bird conservation projects as well.



2015 Hawk Ridge Count Traineeship Financial Report

The \$625 we received from MOU was used directly towards the traineeship stipend covering 6.25 weeks. The overall financial breakdown is below:

	<u>Projected</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Income		
Minnesota Ornithologists' Union	\$ 1,100	\$ 625
Hawk Migration Association of N.A.	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
TOTAL	\$ 2,100	\$ 1,625
Expenditures		
Trainee Stipend	\$ 1,200	\$ 900
Travel	\$ 0	\$ 550
Lodging	\$ 800	\$ 0
Supplies	\$ 100	\$ 0
TOTAL	\$ 2,100	\$ 1,450
Difference	\$ -	\$ 175

**NOTE: Traineeship was reduced from 12 weeks to 9 weeks due to partial grant funding received. Lodging ended up being donated, thus HMANA approved covering travel (flight costs) in lieu, as Kaija did not have a vehicle. Difference of \$175 remaining is from HMANA grant to be used towards 2016 Count Traineeship.*