

## INCREASED BROAD-WINGED HAWKS IN COASTAL BRITISH COLUMBIA

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*Abstract* -- The Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) is a recent fall migrant on southern Vancouver Island. Sightings have increased at other hawk watch sites in western North America.

*Key words:* Broad-winged Hawk, *Buteo platypterus*, fall migrant, increase, Victoria, western North America.

The Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) is a rare summer visitant to the Peace River Lowlands, casual elsewhere in the interior and probably breeds (Campbell *et al.* 1990). It is considered to be a recent addition to the avifauna of B.C. Nine records were cited by Campbell *et al.* (*ibid*) outside of the Peace River Lowlands, the first for B.C. being one at Okanagan Lake in May 1965. The first record for the west coast of North America was on 11 December 1966 in California. Since then, it has become a regular migrant in California (Campbell *et al.* 1990).

There were no records from Vancouver Island until 28 September 1990 (Siddle 1991a,b), when two were observed soaring over Rocky Point. Since then, Broad-wings have been seen every year over one or more of the lookouts in the area known as Becher Bay Headlands (48° 19' North, 123° 34' West) (Table 1). The skies over Becher Bay Headlands have been well documented as a marshalling area for Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) and raptors (Stirling 1988). Becher Bay Headlands, 25 km. west of Victoria, encompasses several lookouts on southern Vancouver Island, including Mount Matheson, Rocky Point, Cheanuh Overlook and sites within East Sooke Regional Park. South-bound raptors and particularly Turkey Vultures concentrate there before crossing the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Migration has been monitored there since 1988 (Edwards and Greig 1994; Stirling 2000).

One was also seen in nearby Victoria on 22 October 2002 (Cecile 2003), a probable melanistic bird was observed at Island View Beach on 22 October 1990 (Siddle 1991a), and near the opposite end of Vancouver Island, one flew over Triangle Island off Cape Scott on 3 September 1994 (Bowling 1995).

The Hawk Migration Association of North America's fall 1998 Flyway Report shows that no Broad-wings were seen at the Pine Pass, B.C. (44° 30' North, 122° 42' West), which would seem to be the logical route for migrants from the Peace Lowlands to the south-west coast (Sherrington 1998a). On the Alberta side of the Rocky Mountains only 20 were seen at the Lorette lookout (50° 58' North, 115° 8' West), where 7,918 Golden Eagles (*Aquila chryseos*) were recorded in 1998 (Sherrington 1998b), but at Windy Point (50° 40' North, 114° 34' West) 734 Broad-wings, 219 on 15 September, were recorded (Smith 1998). The compiler states "Broad-wings were

observed almost daily between August 19 and September 30...the growth in numbers in the last decade has been spectacular." This count, begun in 1967, recorded its first Broad-wing in 1988, when 72 were seen (Smith 1998).

On the Pacific Flyway in 1998, the only site reporting Broad-wings in Washington and Oregon was Chelan Ridge, Washington, where seven were seen over a period of four days (van der Geld 1998). As in most of British Columbia, Broad-winged Hawks are new to Washington's avifauna (Larrison 1977; Clark and Anderson 1984). Farther south in California, the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory reported 103 in 1998 (McDermott 1988).

In the lower mainland of B.C. one was reported on the unlikely date of 3 February 1999 in North Vancouver (Bowling 1996b), one was seen over Vancouver on 15 September 2000 (Bain and Shanahan 2000), an immature was chased across Hastings Street at Heatley Avenue, Vancouver on 5 September 2002 (Martin K. McNicholl, personal communication), and an adult was at Watershed Park, Vancouver on 1 October 2002 (Cecile 2003). In 2003, McNicholl also observed an immature in atypically open habitat on a fence post near the southwestern corner of Vancouver International Airport on Sea Island, Richmond on 11 July 2003 (Bain 2003) and presumably the same bird on a piling in the middle arm of the Fraser River close to more typical habitat of shoreline trees by an open field north of Richmond's Dinsmore Bridge on 5 August 2003. It was also reportedly seen at or near the latter site on 23 July 2003 (Bain (2003)) by another observer.

Further inland, two documented at Eaglet Lake in 1989 were the first for the Prince George area (Weber and Cannings 1990), where they have since become regular. Broad-wings have nested both there and near Golden (Bain 2002). Records have also been published from Bridesville (Bain and Shanahan 2000), Black Mountain/Kelowna (Charlesworth 2000; Bain and Shanahan 2000), Mugaha Bay near MacKenzie (Bain and Shanahan 2000) and the West Kootenays (Bain 2002). A follow-up note documenting these records in full would be warranted.

The increase in Broad-wing reports can be attributed partly to the phenomenal increase in bird-watching activity and the discovery of many more hawk migration

**TABLE 1**  
**BROAD-WINGED HAWK OBSERVATIONS AT BECHER BAY HEADLANDS,**  
**VANCOUVER ISLAND, B.C.**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Number Observed</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Sources</b>
28 September 1990	2	Rocky Point	Siddle (1991a, 1991b)
28 September 1991	1	raptor watch	Editors (1991)
29 September 1991	1	East Sooke Park	Editors (1919); Siddle (1992a, 1992b)
30 September 1991	1 unconfirmed	Rocky Point	Siddle (1992a, 1992b)
12 September 1992	1	East Sooke Park (Beechey Point)	Siddle (1993a, 1993b); van der Geld (1993)
27 September 1992	1	East Sooke Park	Bain and Holder (1992)
17-29 September 1994	2	East Sooke Park	Bain (1994)
18-28 September 1994	3-4	Rocky Point Migration Monitoring Station	Bowling (1995)
25 September 1994	1	Sooke	Bain (1994)
10-24 September 1995	up to 6	East Sooke Park	Bain and Holder (1995a)
10 September – 1 October 1995	4-7	Rocky Point Banding Station	Bowling (1996a, 1996b)
30 September 1995	1	Becker Bay area	van der Geld (1996)
27 October 1995	1	Mount Newton	Bain and Holder (1995b)
19 September 1996	1	Rocky Point	Bain and Holder (1996)
last week of September 1996	5 or +	East Sooke Park	Bain and Holder (1996)
28 September 1997	1	Rocky Point	Bowling (1998)
5 September 1998	2	Rocky Point Banding Station	Bain and Shanahan (1998)
26 September 1998	1	Rocky Point	van der Geld (1999)
September 1998	up to 8	Rocky Point Banding Station	Bain and Shanahan (1998)
Fall 1998	at least 6	southern tip of Vancouver Island	Shepard (1999)
20 September 1998	4	Rocky Point	Shepard (1999)
Fall 1999	at least 25	Rocky Point	Shepard (2000)
7 October 1999	7	Rocky Point	Shepard (2000)
24 September 2001	5	Rocky Point Bird Observatory	Bain (2001)
21 September 2002	2	Rocky Point Bird Observatory	Bain (2002)

sites in recent years. The Broad-wing is rather inconspicuous on its breeding grounds. It perches in or below the forest canopy rather than on snag tops and it soars only briefly. In contrast, Broad-wings on migration are highly visible, often moving and soaring *en masse*, presenting an exciting spectacle for the hawk-watcher. Their winter range is from southern Mexico to Peru, occasionally farther north.

In western Canada, the Broad-wing is a summer visitor and breeder in the aspen parklands and the southern portion of the boreal forest from Manitoba to northeastern B.C. (Campbell *et al.* 1990). Forest fires, logging and land clearing for agriculture have opened up large areas of the southern boreal forest, particularly in Alberta and northeastern B.C., artificially increasing the aspen parkland component. This new habitat has, perhaps, benefited the Broad-wing, resulting in increased populations and further range expansion - good news in an otherwise depressing raptor scene.

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