

Field Trip Report: Classroom and Field Raptor Identification Workshop

October 1, 2011

Trip Leader: Allen Fish

Hawk Hill in the Marin Headlands is the best place to observe the fall migration of raptors on the Pacific coast. Allen Fish, Director of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, with the help of 250 volunteers per year, has been studying this migration for over 26 years. Thirty-five people turned out for Allen's informative, entertaining and condensed (from 12 hours) course on raptor field identification. Eighteen species of raptors are normally encountered during a year at Hawk Hill, but identification gets complicated when Allen starts talking about male/female differences,



Broad-winged Hawk

juvenile versus adult characteristics, color morphs, etc. Allen's many photos and diagrams helped the attendees to sort this all out.

Late morning we moved from the classroom to Hawk Hill, prepared to negotiate the finer points of separating Cooper's Hawk from Sharp-shinned Hawk. The weather, however, shifted from foggy to foggy/drizzly and the wind was from the south, creating a headwind for

the birds. There was not much up in the air until later in the afternoon. Those that stuck it out were rewarded with multiple Red-tailed Hawk, a couple of red-shouldered Hawk, several American Kestrel, two Peregrine Falcon and a really nice, close look at a pair of Broad-winged Hawk (a California rarity) right overhead. All in all, a great day!

Report & Photo by Dave Herrema