



Toronto Ornithological Club **Newsletter**

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Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch

Text by Jean Iron, photos by Ann Brokelman

Atop the Scarborough Bluffs in east Toronto is Rosetta McClain Gardens, a beautiful City of Toronto park and home to the Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch. Every day from late August to the end of November, the hawk counter, Walter Fisher, takes his position overlooking Lake Ontario to count hawks migrating along the shoreline from east to west, and a group of loyal hawkwatchers accompanies him. From this exceptional vantage point hawks are regularly seen flying low along the Bluffs, and instead of looking up, often one looks down on top of the birds or sideways where they are at eye level. We are frequently amazed to see how far out on the lake some hawks fly, even Turkey Vultures, as they cut towards downtown Toronto.

Close to Lake Ontario, the site tallies impressive numbers of Ospreys, Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Northern Goshawks, Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Merlins and Peregrine Falcons. An interesting article about Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch in the February 2011 issue of *Toronto Birds* has charts summarizing monthly and yearly counts, and an insightful analysis of the 2010 fall migration.

BIGFRANK (Frank Butson) started the Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch in 2004 but recently moved to the Schomberg area, so the count continues in 2011 with Walter Fisher at the helm. Record keeping is well done and informative. Every evening after the watch, Walter posts the day's results, season totals and daily commentary on a website that is loaded with close photos of migrating hawks, very helpful in settling identification challenges. Photos from the day are uploaded right away so the website is always current.

The abundance of flowers attracts many butterflies, and Monarch migration is spectacular with 50 plus per minute recorded on one day at the peak this fall. Diurnal migration of landbirds can be remarkable and one never knows what surprises it holds. American White Pelican, Short-eared Owl and Cave Swallows were recorded in 2010.



Osprey at Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch on 10 September 2010.



Juvenile Cooper's Hawk at Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch on 21 November 2010.

Rosetta McClain Gardens has distinctive features such as signs in Braille, a scent garden and full accessibility. Washrooms are open until about 25 October. There is ample parking and it's on a TTC bus route. One day in early October, a teacher brought her students to see the birds. They were from nearby Variety Village, a fitness and sports facility for young people with disabilities. One youngster was so taken with the hawks and looking through my scope at ducks and gulls on the lake, he wasn't even impressed seeing the spray rising from Niagara Falls. With great pride he showed me the medal he received from the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario for his achievement in a special sports event. He was so keen about birds that I hope someone nurtures his interest.

Next time there is a north or northwest wind, consider coming to Rosetta McClain Gardens. Hawks and a warm welcome from the local hawk watchers await you. Directions: Take Kingston Road east 0.8 km past Birchmount Road to the next traffic light at Glen Everest Road. Turn right into the parking lot and walk a short distance to the fence overlooking Lake Ontario.

Links:

Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch
<http://raptorwatch.blogspot.com/>

Toronto Birds (Vol. 5 No. 2 Pages 45-48)
http://torontobirding.ca/information/includes/TorontoBirds_2011-02.pdf