

Peregrine Falcon
by John W. Taylor

Black-and-white photo of a full-color lithograph
(See page 181)

A HAWK-WATCHERS MECCA

by Jim Brett, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

Birders need meccas, places where favorite species can be seen in good numbers and where comrades can gather to mull over experiences. Yet, only a minority of birders are able to visit these hot spots regularly and share the ultimate in "spectator sports." These are the lucky ones who can afford both the time and money. They are the envy of many others who must spend hours planning that once-a-year or even lifetime birding adventure. Certain meccas come to mind: Machias, Brigantine, Cheat Mountain, Corkscrew, Montezuma, Bull Island, Madera Canyon, Padre Island, Cape May and so on. The list is not endless, but extensive; each place commands its own following of birds and people.

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in eastern Pennsylvania certainly has become a unique birding mecca, one that is unparalleled on the birder's hot-spot list. Combine spectacular scenery, the ability to rub elbows with the high priests and priestesses of birding, and the passage of autumnal migrating hawks, eagles, and falcons, and you have a site of high distinction.

Let's plan a trip to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, high atop the Appalachian Mountains. Perhaps the best way to begin would be to read Hawks Aloft by the late Maurice Broun, the sanctuary's first curator. He tells how this mountaintop was snatched from the clutches of hawk shooters in 1934 by one of the most dynamic forces in conservation, Rosalie Edge, and how he carved a sanctuary of distinction from this rough-and-tumble place. Hawks Aloft sets the stage.

Next, purchase a copy of Feathers in the Wind, the definitive guide to the sanctuary and its hawk migration. Each species of eastern hawk is discussed, and you are provided with silhouettes, sketches, days of concentration at Hawk Mountain, span of migration, and some general natural history of the birds. Information on how to obtain these books is found at the end of this article.

One can't master from books the identification of the 14 species of diurnal raptors that pass by the mountain's lookouts. However, some familiarization is essential such as learning the basic silhouettes of the major groups: buteos, accipiters, falcons, eagles, Osprey, and harriers. An excellent study sheet, prepared by the New England Hawk Watch, is available from the sanctuary. From mid-August until early December, there are Hawk Mountain staff members on duty at one or more of the lookouts to instruct folks on hawk identification. This personalized attention is very important in

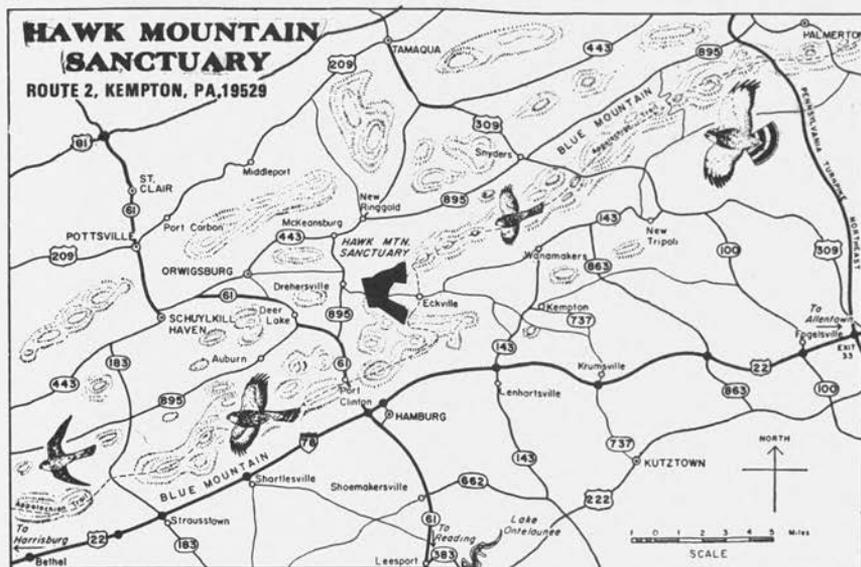
the sanctuary's dedication to education.

It is also valuable, we think, to become knowledgeable about the mountain's geologic history, the evolution of the great eastern forests, the cultural history of the Hawk Mountain area, the unsurpassed fall migration. All these are adequately discussed in the above publications.

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary is such a mystical, magical spot that to come without a sense of the past or a feel for the total picture would be to cheat yourself out of a unique adventure.

There are many ways to approach the sanctuary. Using the interstate highway system, the trip can be rather effortless. Minimum driving time from eastern Massachusetts is eight hours, and I recommend Interstate routes 90-86-84-81. But diversity of countryside from Boston, westward through the Berkshires, into the Catskills of eastern New York state, and down to the Appalachians via the Pocono Plateau, might be reason enough to escape the high-speed, heavily traveled interstates. It would be a bonus if the trip coincided with autumn's flaming foliage. And if you have a copy of Pettingill's A Guide to Bird Finding East of the Mississippi, other birding attractions might be plugged into the trip.

Once you get within 30 miles of the sanctuary, use the map here. Of course, all you need do when you're near the mountain is ask a local resident. You'll normally receive quick and easy directions, some of which may bring you across local secondary roads winding through the beautiful Pennsylvania Dutch farmlands immediately to the north and east of the mountain. If you should get highly disoriented, phone the sanctuary (215-756-6961), and we'll pilot you in.



You can't do Hawk Mountain in one day - make the drive, hike (easily) to the lookouts, watch hawks, and return. Write Hawk Mountain for a list of accommodations. Unlike many birding areas, Hawk Mountain is rather isolated, but within 25 miles there are excellent-to-terrible motels and the same diversity of restaurants. Our list includes those facilities which we've come to know as the best for the money; these are the ones that cater to Hawk Mountain people year after year. The facilities range from farm-house boarding to moderately priced motels, and from sandwich shops to fine restaurants.

Also, campgrounds are scattered within 10 miles of Hawk Mountain. Each proprietor knows us and is eager to help the newcomer. Grocery stores are available within the same area. Albright's Mill, in Kempton, Pennsylvania, about eight miles to our east, is the nearest, and its staff is the most familiar with Hawk Mountain and the surrounding countryside. It is also one of the last general merchants in the area, and so a visit is in itself a treat.



June Greenawalt, Hawk Mountain's experienced receptionist, can help you plan your trip. A letter or phone call is all that's necessary. If you're coming in an organized group, we will set up accommodations, plan an orientation program upon your arrival, and introduce you to the mountain before you take to the lookouts. Few birding hot spots do more for you.

Although Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has natural highlights throughout the year, fall is phenomenal. Annually since the great ice sheet became secure in the Arctic, birds of prey have migrated southward from Canada along the Appalachian ridges, on their way to wintering grounds in the southern United States, the Caribbean Islands, or in the foothills of the Peruvian Andes.

The last days of summer, mid-August to early September, are warm and sultry; summer sometimes hangs on well into October. The staff begins its official count around the second week in August. At this time, a few strong cold fronts might develop in the north central states and Canada, and these climatological changes motivate birds of prey to migrate. Early arrivals, forerunners of up to 30,000 individuals, include the Bald Eagle and Osprey.

By the end of August, we can see up to six Bald Eagles a day and many more Osprey. The latter are often most numerous in the afternoon and early evening; to be on the North Lookout and witness a steady movement of these birds, some carrying fish, is a thrilling sight.

Of course, other hawk-watching spots are better known for sheer numbers of these species. See Heintzelman's A Guide To Hawk Watching In North America. But to sit on a bold promontory 1,000 feet above the surrounding farmland, on rocks that ages ago were sea bottom, and look eye-to-eye or maybe down onto the back of an Osprey or Bald Eagle in a late evening sun is a quality we're willing to trade for quantity anytime. The ridge position allows for this type of experience (see sketch), and the promontory is so positioned that one can gain almost a 280° panorama.



Hawk Mountain's regular hawk watchers have their favorite species and favorite time to be there. Many take vacation time or holidays for Broad-winged Hawk season. It spans September, and on the average the 17th has been the "charmed day" when more Broadwings are seen than on any other. Oh yes, there have been other "big days," from the 14th through the 24th, when exceptional numbers of Broadwings occur. A big day could be 10,000 Broadwings, or it could be THE big day, as was September 14, 1978, when over 21,000 were seen in just over six hours! That was a day when weather maps pointed to a washout. But it was also the day after more northerly observers (such as at Wachusett Mountain) had reported equally staggering counts.

As September closes, Broadwing numbers dwindle and Sharp-shinned Hawks build up. Developing cold fronts with chilly nights and breezy days produce good flights. For a long time, the staff has placed papier-mache Great Horned Owls atop long poles. During a good flight, Sharpies dive at the owls while zipping over the heads of the spectators. Fun! Then summer wanes, leaves begin to change, and Cooper's Hawks, Peregrine Falcons, Merlins, American Kestrels, and Northern Harriers dominate the scene. The most beautiful of eastern hawks, the Red-shouldered, arrives coincident with the peak foliage coloration. How exhilarating it is to gaze down on the brilliant plumage of an adult backdropped by the oranges, reds, and russets of the forest canopy. Nothing, however, compares to the Broadwing and Sharp-shin flights.

The next major raptor push occurs in mid-October with the Red-tailed flight. Stronger cold fronts with higher winds trigger the movement of these birds. Cooper's and Sharp-shins continue to pass, but in diminishing numbers. Northern Goshawks, a highly cyclic species, prefer the cold, blustery days of November.

Late October and early November also hint even more of winter, and it is the dyed-in-the-wool birder who can sit atop this mountain for eight hours in 30 mph winds and plunging temperatures. Yet, the experience is well worth the effort. This is Golden Eagle time! For many it is the high point of a birding career, to see a Golden Eagle, hackles ablaze, fly close to the lookout at eye level and unconcerned with a 50 mph wind. This occurs on many days, and when it does, a standing ovation erupts from the lookout.

Care is needed to keep the elements at bay: plenty of liquids to ward off hyperthermia, plenty of wool or down clothing, plenty of stamina. There are even bonuses for the hardy such as a late movement of Redtails or Goshawks, Golden Eagles moving in snow squalls, and the camaraderie of equally dedicated companions.

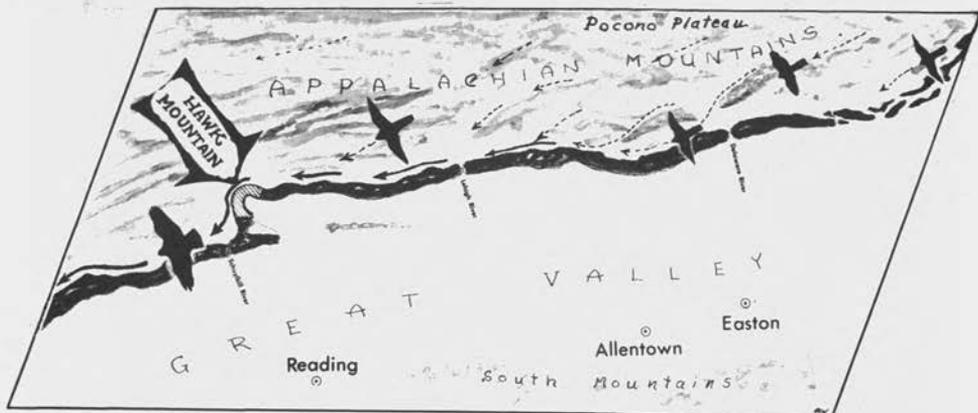
The usual day-pack, filled with warm or cold drink, snacks, and sandwiches needs no elaboration. No food is sold on the

sanctuary. To judge the amount of clothing necessary, we listen to forecasts of the high and low temperature for the day to come. As a rule, we subtract 10° to 15° from the low, considering this the effect of wind chill, and carry enough clothing to get us through an eight to ten hour day. It is always very easy to remove layers. The combination of wool and down is excellent. Those of us who "live" on the look-outs during the fall have found that down garments alone are not adequate. A heavy wool sweater and a light down or fiber-filled jacket can often get us through the coldest days. We always carry windbreakers bulky enough to slip over everything. There are also times when we've carried practically everything we owned and still froze.

I have only highlighted the hawk season. Interspersed from September through November are waterfowl crisscrosses and warbler movements. Often when the hawk flight is slow, birders search the forest for other species. "Hummer!" is echoed across the rocks as these feathered jewels whiz by. The elusive Pileated Woodpecker, a resident on Hawk Mountain, is available to the visitor who scans the forest on the north slope above the Schuylkill River. The Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Bird Checklist is a must for any visitor at any time of year; 243 species have been recorded since 1934.

The sanctuary is supported by a faithful corps, members of the Hawk Migration Sanctuary Association. They are our life-blood. Our invitation to become more than just a casual acquaintance of Hawk Mountain is the underlying message of any article about the sanctuary. We receive no support from any government agency.

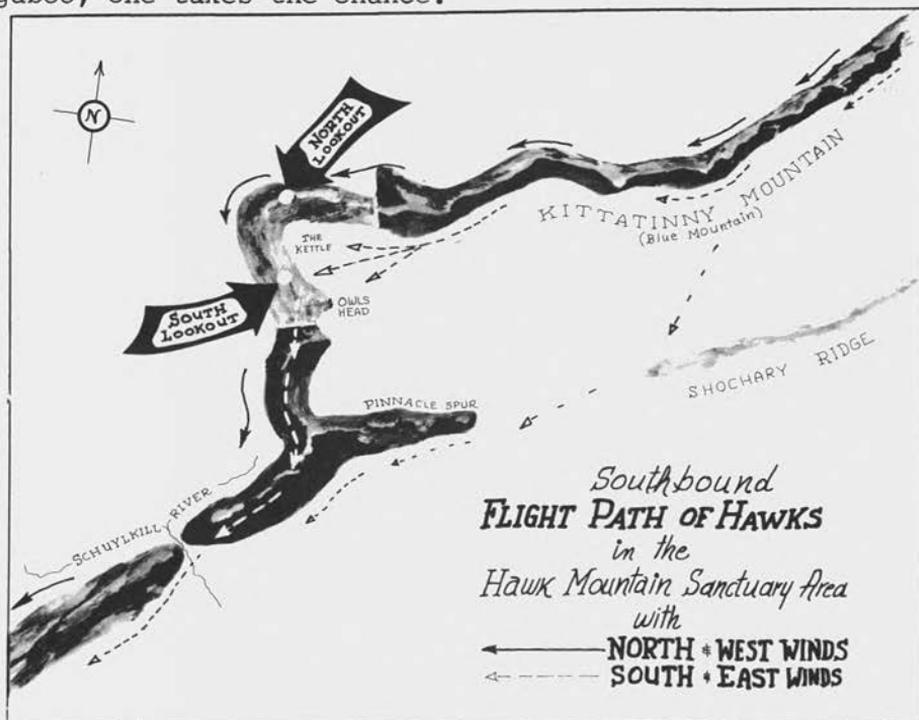
The Sanctuary Visitor Center should be your first stop when you arrive. There you will find a small sales area that contains a very complete selection of natural history materials. Film is available. If you haven't done it before, now is the time to become a Hawk Mountain member. By doing so, you will have free admission to the trail, as well as involvement in our work. (Nonmembers are charged an admission fee.)



In the Commons of the Visitor Center are displayed all of the species of raptors that migrate through our area. This exhibit enables you to learn the various shapes, sizes, and plumage variations of the representative age groups. Hawks, falcons, and eagles are suspended in mobile form from the ceiling. You enter the Visitor Center on a level above the mobiles and descend to the Commons - views from above and below. The history of the sanctuary and the ecology of raptors and their migration are also presented there. A raised relief map of the Appalachians covers a large section of the exhibit area, and visitors can follow the ridges and valleys from New England to Virginia as they walk down the staircase.

The Commons serves as a meeting area for introductory programs presented to nature and birding groups. Also, each Saturday evening through September and October, illustrated lectures are given there or in the outdoor amphitheater.

The migration of birds of prey, though sparked by many variables and unknowns, can be predicted rather accurately. The adage, "No wind-no hawks" works most of the time. In the "September doldrums" nary a breeze stirs, yet the Broadwings move though they do not concentrate. For most of the season, winds are necessary (see sketch). Hawk watchers are weather watchers. They look for the development of Canadian high-pressure cells that push cold fronts across New England. When conditions are right they hurry to the mountain; some will drive 100 miles in the predawn hours just to get here by daybreak for the first push of raptors. In most cases, when a trip is planned a long time in advance, weather remains the bugaboo; one takes the chance.



A good pair of binoculars is essential; any medium-priced glass is adequate. The binoculars' power is important; 7X pair won't allow you to pick up a kettle of Broadwings on the far ridge or to watch a distant eagle drift across the valley. Most veterans prefer 10X. Some stalwarts even bring 15X and 20X glasses - real neckbreakers. Spotting scopes are used on occasion when the lookouts aren't swarming with people. A scope mounted on a tripod can be very useful when attempting to identify a distant eagle but can be quite frustrating on a busy weekend.

It is very impractical to carry large photographic lenses to the lookout. Migrating hawks are difficult to photograph by the novice since they appear and disappear quickly. Those who have carried equipment to the lookouts and who have been patient have been rewarded with good shots.

The stage has been set. You've been introduced to Hawk Mountain and have been briefed on how to plan for a trip. After visiting us, if we can be of further help, don't hesitate to call or write. The Sanctuary Visitor Center is open every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and longer on weekends in the fall. Trails are open till dusk.

See you on the mountain!

The materials listed below can be obtained at the following address: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, R.D.#2, Kempton, PA 19529. Telephone: 215-756-6961. Orders are postpaid.

<u>Hawks Aloft</u> by Maurice Broun	\$8.95
<u>Feathers in the Wind</u> by Jim Brett	\$3.00
<u>A Field Guide for Hawks Seen in the Northeast</u> (silhouette sheet)	\$1.00
<u>Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Bird Checklist</u>	\$1.50

JIM BRETT, present Curator of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and an active birder, has directed the educational services of the sanctuary for the past ten years.

PEREGRINE FALCON PRINT

The Hawk Migration Association of North America announces that, through special arrangement, it is offering for sale numbered, signed prints of this limited edition (500) Peregrine Falcon lithograph by John W. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor, an internationally recognized wildlife artist, is perhaps best known for his many featured illustrations in Virginia Wildlife. He has also served as artist-editor for the Maryland Department of Game and Fisheries and has been commissioned by the National Geographic Society and the National Wildlife Federation. Many will recall his Whistling Swans Christmas card for the NWF.

The full-color, full-sized print measures 16 inches by 20 inches.

For a limited time only, HMANA is offering this beautiful print to its members at a special price of \$20, including postage and handling. The price for nonmembers is \$30 postpaid. However, nonmembers can join the association, annual membership dues \$8, and purchase the print at the member's price of \$20, saving \$2 while obtaining a full year's membership in the association.

HMANA's membership benefits include a decal, a membership card, two newsletters a year, and special prices on HMANA's other publications, including rental of its sets of slides on hawks. More important, each member's dues help finance the research necessary to better understand the migration of and protect the welfare of our birds of prey.

Order your prints soon, and order additional prints for Christmas and birthday presents. Members can order more than one print at their special price of \$20.

To obtain your prints and join the association, send your name and address (printed), and a check made out to HMANA for the appropriate sum, to:

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