

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

September 2006

Hawk Migration

Each fall, hundreds of thousands of hawks eagles, ospreys and falcons move from their breeding grounds across North America and to their wintering grounds, some as far away as southern South America.

Migrating hawks follow well-defined routes as they move south. Most hawks are soaring birds that depend on updrafts to help them travel. This means that they migrate during the day and do not tend to cross large bodies of water where these updrafts are not present. Instead, they will follow a land routes and shorelines to navigate around large bodies of water. For this reason, certain geographical locations become concentration spots where hawks gather prior to crossing a narrow stretch of water. Such locations are excellent places to observe migrating hawks.

There are some very well known sites for observing migrating hawks. Point Pelee in Ontario, Cape May in New Jersey, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania and Veracruz in Mexico are just a few. In these locations tens of thousands of raptors migrate through during the fall season. Veracruz probably has the highest concentration of raptors anywhere in the world. Each fall an average of four million hawks, including two million Broad-winged Hawks, migrate through this site.



Did you know?

That Broad-winged Hawks migrate in huge groups called kettles.



That Swainson's Hawks spend the winter months in Argentina.



That 18 species of hawks, eagles and falcons migrate through Manitoba.



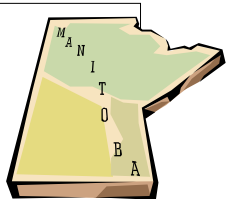
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Here in Manitoba



The fall migration for raptors starts in late August and continues through to November when the water finally freezes.

The peak times to see migrating hawks is early to mid-September when large numbers are moving through southern Manitoba.

American Kestrels, Ospreys and Northern Harriers are usually some of the first raptors to move through, starting in mid-August. To observe Sharp-shinned and Coopers Hawks late August or early September is the best time. Next come the Broad-winged Hawks through early to mid-September. Red-tailed Hawks migrate next, followed by Rough-legged Hawks and falcons. By late October most of the hawks



are gone and the Bald Eagles are the only ones left; they usually stay until the water freezes.

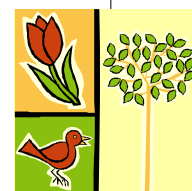


To find hawks in the fall the best locations are along the big lakes. There is an annual hawk watch in early

September where groups go out and record all of the raptors they see along their prescribed route.

What about spring?

Spring migration in raptors is very different than in the fall; it is much more concentrated. The birds start to come back in early to mid-March and by mid-April most have arrived. The spring migration can be much more impressive as you can see thousands of birds in a single day.



There are two good places to find raptors in the spring. The first is the St. Adolphe bridge just south of Winnipeg.

The second (and best) place to see raptors in the spring is the Pembina Valley near Windygates, Manitoba. It is about a two and a half hour drive from Winnipeg, but well worth it. The hawks are following the river valley and are using winds and thermals rising from the valley slopes. The following species can be seen there:

- Osprey
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper's Hawk
- Northern Goshawk
- Red-shouldered Hawk (rare)
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Swainson's Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Ferruginous Hawk (rare)
- Rough-legged Hawk
- Golden Eagle
- American Kestrel
- Merlin
- Gyrfalcon (rare)
- Peregrine Falcon
- Prairie Falcon

