

# Hawk Watching at Waggoner's Gap

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q. Why is Waggoner's Gap a good place to see raptors?**

**A.** Migrating raptors need to travel long distances, and it is beneficial to them if they can conserve energy. One way to do this is to take advantage of uplifting winds along linear ridges. The Kittatinny Ridge, where Waggoner's Gap is located, is situated on a southwest orientation for over 200 miles, from New Jersey to Maryland. Birds flying along the ridge can glide with little effort to reach their destinations to the south. Waggoner's Gap is a good location for observation because it provides great views both north and south, so birds may be seen no matter which side of the ridge they are traveling.

### **Q. How far do these birds go?**

**A.** It varies by species. Some of the early to mid-season birds like broad-winged hawks, peregrines and ospreys, are long distance migrants that will fly all the way to areas of South America. Birds that migrate later in the season, like red-tailed hawks and golden eagles, may only go south along the Appalachian Mountains to West Virginia. In the case of red-tailed hawks, they may not even leave Pennsylvania.

### **Q. How do you know the birds aren't being counted more than once?**

**A.** During migration, most of the birds are flying in one direction, southwest along the ridge. To be counted, a raptor must pass beyond a point southwest of the watch site. If a bird is seen flying back northeast, it is subtracted from the count.

### **Q. Who are the people doing the counting?**

**A.** The hawk watch is owned by Audubon PA and the count is part of a nationwide effort through the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) to collect data about raptor migration. At Waggoner's Gap, a seasonal employee and several volunteers handle data collection.

### **Q. What happens to the data that are collected?**

**A.** The data are entered daily into an online database that is managed (HMANA) for analysis and historical trending. Visit: [http://hawkcount.org/month\\_summary.php?rsite=439](http://hawkcount.org/month_summary.php?rsite=439)

### **Q. How many days and weeks does the count take place?**

**A.** Staff and/or volunteers are onsite every day between August 1 and finishes December 31, depending on the weather.

### **Q. Why is there an owl decoy on a pole?**

**A.** Certain raptors, especially sharp-shinned, Cooper's hawks and falcons, consider owls to be enemies to the point that they will attack one if they see it. Keeping an owl decoy near the watch site tends to bring some hawks closer, as they swoop in to make passes at the owl to drive this predator away.

### **Q. How did all these rocks get here?**

**A.** Approximately 440 million years ago, these rocks, which are sandstone, started as sand deposits in a huge inland sea. After more eroded materials were deposited on top, movement and collision of the continental plates about 250 million years ago caused the rocks to be uplifted, creating mountains that were at least 20,000 feet high. Since that time, erosion by wind and water has slowly worn the ridge down to its present condition. This ridge stands above the adjacent valleys because the sandstone here is more resistant to erosion than the limestone and shale, which underlie the valleys.

**Websites with information on hawk migration and other relevant material:**

Audubon PA - Information about the hawk watch and Audubon PA:

<https://pa.audubon.org/conservation/waggoners-gap-hawkwatch>

Waggoner's Gap Hawk Watch - Information about the hawk watch and historic data:

[www.waggap.com](http://www.waggap.com)

Hawkcount Site Profile and Count Data for Waggoner's Gap:

<https://hawkcount.org/siteinfo.php?rsite=439>

Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA)

<http://www.hmana.org/>

Birdhawk – HMANA Hawk Watch Exchange; Daily watch count data for various watch sites:

<https://www.hmana.org/birdhawk-listserv/>

PABIRDS - Daily postings about birding, including hawk watch data:

<http://birding.aba.org/maillist/PA01>

**Landscape features that help locate migrating raptors**

