

Earlier in the week on Tuesday evening, a birder has been watching the weather reports for days on the nightly news and the cable weather channel. He has studied all the newspaper weather maps. He knows from his reading and from what others have told him that westerly to northwesterly winds following a cold front

can produce sizable hawk flights. His destination is Illinois Beach State Park just north of Chicago, about an hour and half drive from where he lives. From everything he can figure, Thursday is the day, two days from today. He contemplates taking the day off from work if all looks good on Wednesday night.

He awakens early on Thursday morning and turns on the cable weather channel and confirms the winds will be from the northwest and increasing throughout the day to 25 miles per hour. He packs a sandwich and a few goodies and fills a water bottle. One quick glance at the road map and he's on his way. Breezing

## Tools for a Budding Hawkwatcher

Below are a few recommendations for a beginning hawkwatcher as well as some useful information for those who have had "a little time under the sun" and have had "their faces pointed to the wind."

### ***Binoculars and Scopes***

Binoculars with at least 7X are required, with 10X being the best. Why is 10X better? Many of the hawks you will see are mere specks in the sky to the unaided eye. It is true that a higher powered scope can be a handy tool for identification of these specks, but many times the view of the hawk is lost just trying to find its location in the sky. 10X binoculars if held steady offer the best chance of identifying a distant hawk. Sometimes just a few more seconds with a good view clinches the ID. Also factor in field of view and weight. Binoculars with the widest field of view, the highest power, and lighter weight allow the best situation for viewing.

As the days of October come, so does a chill in the air. Sitting or standing in one spot for any length of time isn't the best way to stay warm. Extra layers of clothing and a good pair of gloves are required. Sometimes you may even need heavy duty winter boots. Also bring something to sit on, such as a folding chair or simply a blanket, and don't forget to protect any exposed skin with sun block.

### ***Books & Videos***

The following is a list of recommended aids in the study of hawks, especially the understanding and identification of migrating hawks.

#### **1. *Hawks in Flight*, by Pete Dunne, David Sibley, & Clay Sutton (1988)**

Describes in detail, characteristics of hawks as seen flying overhead. All North American species of raptors are covered, but the focus is on eastern hawks where the authors have spent a significant part of their life studying and conducting hawk migration counts. The book is small enough to carry in the field, but studying the information prior to your first attempt at hawk watching is a good idea. This is the number one book for learning how to identify hawks as seen in the sky.

#### **2. *Hawks of North America (Peterson Field Guide)*, William S. Clark & Brian K. Wheeler (1987)**

The standard field guide for hawk ID. It is thorough in general knowledge and the colored plates and photographs are superb. If there is only one book you want to buy, this is the one.

#### **3. *A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*, by Brian K. Wheeler & William S. Clark (1995) Reprinted with corrections in 1999.**

The premier photo book of hawks both perched and in flight. No other book on the market has as many superb photographs of hawks with complete descriptions as this book. It is a must for all serious hawkwatchers. Make sure you get the 1999 edition.

