

along at 60 miles an hour up Interstate 55 he exits at I-294 headed north. Then up Highway 41 to Wadsworth Road, going east he proceeds into Illinois Beach State Park. The walk from the parking lot to the observation deck at the end of the Dead River Trail is normally about 20 minutes, but he stops and looks at the birds along the way. He arrives at the platform about 10 a.m. and a couple of other hawk watchers inform him that they have already seen a bunch of Red-tailed Hawks, an Osprey, a Cooper's Hawk, a half a dozen Northern Harriers, a bunch of Merlins and who knows how many Sharp-shinned Hawks. He gets excited and starts scanning the skies in all directions to look for hawks. He spots a distant buteo and tries to identify it, he figures it to be a Redtail and continues scanning elsewhere. He sees a bird speeding toward him at incredible speed, must be a Mourning Dove he thinks, but no it's a Merlin! All he had was a second to identify it. Off in the distance he notices the puffy white cumulus clouds forming west of the park and drifting over the lake. He remembers that these clouds are formed from warm rising air called thermals. In the afternoon, the wind has gotten a little stronger, the air chillier. By 2 p.m., he has seen hundreds of hawks and decides to leave. When he reaches his car he flings his backpack into the back seat and slips his binoculars off his neck. Just before he gets in, he glances up and sees another immature Sharp-shinned Hawk struggling in the wind.

These events illustrate a typical day in the life of an immature female Sharp-shinned Hawk on her first migration and a birder on his way to becoming addicted to hawkwatching. For the hawkwatcher, it is both fun and challenging. The challenge is not only in the aspect of identifying migrating hawks, but also the patience and stamina required to endure days when hawks are not



*Red-tailed Hawk photo by Peter Weber.*

in abundance or on days when the weather seems to chill you down to the extreme. The first part of the challenge can be learned, the second part must be experienced. For the hawk, we may never know about the thrill of flying in migration season, but the challenge is to stay alive. What an experience that must be, especially the first time learning it.

### Watching and Counting Hawks

Every fall, hawkwatching fever strikes many birders. We hear of the great hawkwatching spots that also have national notoriety, such as Cape May Point in New Jersey or Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania. A little closer to Illinois, and every bit as productive, we have Hawk Ridge in Duluth, Minnesota and Lake Erie Metro Park near Detroit, Michigan.

These sites offer spectacular sightings of large numbers of hawks, but many of us may not wish to travel that far or have the time required for the trip. A few sites nearer to Illinois can be quite productive.

The most popular is the overlook at Concordia University near Mequon,

Wisconsin. Every year, thousands of hawks migrate along the shoreline of Lake Michigan. An official hawk count has been conducted at Concordia for the past 17 years with more intensive counts conducted since 1996. Data from this site has been reported to The Hawk Migration Association of North America.

In the fall of 1999, observers tallied 7,447 hawks of 14 species, with a big day total on 22 September 1999 of 3,544 hawks counted of which 3,392 were Broad-winged Hawks. The largest Broad-winged Hawk count ever recorded at Concordia came on 18 September 1992 when 14,109 hawks streamed overhead. Concordia's average hawk count total per year, as recorded from 1983 to 1999 is 6,146 hawks. In 1999, 1,448 Sharp-shinned Hawks were tallied, which was slightly below the average of 1,479 over the same 17-year period. One of the most memorable recorded days at Concordia happened on October 14 and 15 of 1995 when Hal Cohen and a group of his students were there for the weekend doing the count. The 2 day count for that weekend