

# New Hawk Watch Begins at Illinois Beach State Park

by Vic Berardi

As a cool northwest wind blows through the west pavilion in the North Unit of Illinois Beach State Park on a mid-October day, underneath a sky filled with big white puffy cumulus clouds, a silent and relatively unnoticed migration of hawks is occurring. The pavilion is empty except for a few picnic tables and remnants of summer barbecues that still remain on the ground.

Two years later in 2001, this same pavilion now has birders scanning the skies counting each hawk that passes by. In 2001, a total of 3,967 raptors were counted from late August through November (See Table 1). The year before in 2000, which was the count's first year at this particular site, a total of 2,831 were counted. All data from these counts were submitted to the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), which collects data from hawk watches from all over the country for those who wish to do research in hawk migration for both spring and fall. Data are published in their bi-annual journal, *Hawk Migration Studies*.

Count totals from one or two years are insignificant for any in-depth studies and conclusions such as trend analyses. The count at Illinois Beach S.P. has data from a few years prior to 2000, but most of it only covers a few days of optimum hawk watching conditions. If a sustained hawk monitoring program can be achieved, then over the course of time more accurate conclusions can be drawn from the data collected. Consecutive years of monitoring will be required and volunteer counters will be needed. Through a coordinated and enthusiastic effort birders of Illinois can contribute a great deal towards bettering our understanding of hawk migration and the role it plays in understanding our environment.

## Hawk Migration and Its Significance

Hawk watch counting at Illinois Beach S.P. helps in determining not only raptor populations and their movement, but also in understanding movements of other bird species. Raptors, which rely heavily on avian prey, generally migrate with that prey or immediately after that prey begins migration. Studies linking the two together will tell us not only how they interact but also something about the environment in which they exist. Migration studies can tell us how to better manage these sites.

The study of hawk migration and seasonal recording of data will help to construct frequency and trend charts. Included in this data are weather conditions, indi-

vidual species, and their numbers. By coupling weather observations with actual migration results we can predict when a hawk movement is likely to occur. For example, fall hawk migration along Lake Michigan's western shore is best on days with westerly winds following a cold front. Without thorough study of thermals and hawk movement we cannot know answers to some questions such as: Do hawks use prevailing winds to move southward more efficiently? If so, why do some species (such as falcons) move in numbers on days that seem counter-productive to the most efficient movement?

## Location

The Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Watch Site is in the North Unit of the state park, which is located in the northeast corner of Lake County near the Wisconsin border. This area, formerly known as Camp Logan,

**Table 1. Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Count 2001 — Year-End Totals**

<b>Days Counted</b>	<b>62</b>	
<b>Hours Counted</b>	<b>319</b>	
Turkey Vulture		390
Osprey		153
Bald Eagle		21
Northern Harrier		232
Sharp-shinned Hawk		1207
Cooper's Hawk		139
Northern Goshawk		7
Red-shouldered Hawk		22
Broad-winged Hawk		39
Red-tailed Hawk		1256
Rough-legged Hawk		40
Golden Eagle		4
American Kestrel		63
Merlin		195
Peregrine Falcon		109
Unidentified Accipiter		29
Unidentified Buteo		27
Unidentified Eagle		1
Unidentified Falcon		16
Unidentified Raptor		17
<b>Total</b>		<b>3967</b>