

tion of seeing a Golden Eagle or a Northern Goshawk keeps people drawn to this type of birding.

Hawk watching may lean more to the sport side of birding mostly because of the challenge it presents. Identifying raptors based on flight characteristics and shape at great distances is rewarding as the bird approaches and your initial identification proves to be correct.

One of the best ways to learn how to identify these "specks" is to follow the bird in from the moment you see it. This is often called "working the bird in." Color and size at great distances often can't be distinguished, but other characteristics can be determined such as flight style and shape. Conclusions can start to be drawn even at a distance. As the hawk comes closer the other features, such as size and coloration, may or may not present themselves.

Learning how to identify raptors at a distance requires a thorough knowledge of all the diagnostic field marks and knowing what to focus on as the hawk approaches. Although the first part of that statement can be learned in the comforts of home, the second part can only be achieved through many hours observing hawks in flight.

The hawk watcher has to learn how to identify the majority of raptors by flight characteristics and shape only. Listing these characteristics doesn't help much; experience is the true teacher.

Here are some ways to become a better hawk watcher.

- Read and re-read books on the subject of identification.
- Spend much time in the field at the hawk watch site. The more hours spent, the more you'll become familiar with the unexplainable characteristics mentioned above.
- Initially, time spent at a hawk watch site should be done in short segments of four or fewer hours. Even experienced birders sometimes grow impatient at a hawk watch.
- Practice patience. Hours can go by without seeing anything, and then suddenly, that changes. Ask any experienced hawk watcher about days where nothing was seen until mid afternoon. A few hours into the afternoon a massive movement of Broad-winged Hawks occurs or maybe a late afternoon flight of Peregrine Falcons speed along the lakefront as a cold front approaches in late September or early October. Of course, sometimes the opposite occurs when most of the hawks recorded for the day move before noon with little to show for in the hours that follow.
- Predictions on weather conditions suitable for hawk migration can be achieved through the use of weather data available in newspaper, in the media, or through the internet. Actual time of day when these migrations will occur is considerably more unpredictable. That's why most hawk watches are conducted from early in the morning until late in the afternoon.
- General birding involves the use of hearing, sight detection, and persistence. It may be compared with a

treasure hunt or a road rally. If birds aren't found at one site the birder moves on to the next until rewarded. To be successful requires not only exceptional skills achieved through years of determination but also knowledge of habitats and seasonal movements of bird populations. These skills, however, don't necessarily translate into being a good hawk watcher.

- Hawk watching for the most part is much slower and more methodical. To become good at hawk watching, patience has to be learned gradually. Watching hawks for three or four hours at one time can slowly build a patient attitude. If no hawks are moving in the first hour you have to force yourself to stay the second and then the third and finally the fourth. You can't be worried about what you're not seeing elsewhere even as passerines fly by in great numbers. Patience. Eventually, you will become rewarded with seeing hawks and learning how to identify them. And no matter what occurs that day or what the weather is like it's those great days of big hawk flights or the sighting of something rare that keeps you coming back.
- Dress appropriately. For hawk watching to be comfortable, know what to wear. Because fall hawk watching is generally done in cool or cold weather, warm clothes are required. Dress for at least 10-20 degrees colder than forecasted and take special note of the wind chill. Because hawk watching is stationary, you will become cold in even moderately cool weather. Keep your feet warm. Arctic boots for below-zero weather may be necessary on days in the upper 40s. Comfort on days when hawks aren't moving in great numbers makes the outing much more enjoyable.

Paul Sweet, the hawk counter mentioned above, has developed all the qualifications of an experienced and skillful hawk watcher. Building upon exceptional birding skills and persistence in the field, he has spent the last two fall seasons counting hawks at Illinois Beach State Park. Many of the skills Sweet acquired came after he spent long hours observing birds from stationary locations.

Without patience, determination and paying attention to the slightest of details, he may not have achieved as much as he has over the last two hawk watching seasons. His patience was rewarded twice in 2001 when he saw the largest single day Osprey migration occur on 10 September with a count of 66. Most of these birds came late in the day when only 46 other identifiable raptors passed by.

Sweet was also rewarded on 3 October 2001 when he counted 41 Peregrine Falcons, and on 2 October 2000 when he counted 33 Peregrine Falcons also seen late in the afternoon. The time Sweet spent counting hawks at Illinois Beach State Park has rewarded him with a job counting hawks this fall for Hawk Watch International near Corpus Christi, Texas.