

Hawk Mountain during October equals fall foliage and hundreds of hawks

October is prime time to discover nature at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. Here, several thousand birds of prey will soar by on their southbound migration, and a jaw-dropping view of fall foliage will stretch for nearly 70 miles.

“This is the month when people come to Hawk Mountain for both the mountain and the migration,” says Sanctuary Educator Denise Peters.

“Unless we have heavy rain or fog, nearly every visitor during October should see hawks in flight, and even better, you have a chance to see more than 100 on any one day. An added bonus is that mid-month, the fall foliage is unbeatable,” she adds.

It's little surprise that fall's color is worth a trip itself. The scenic overlooks at Hawk Mountain boast one of the best views in the East and the leaves at Hawk Mountain already have started their once-a-year show. In early October, color is courtesy of early-turning red maples and black gum trees that will deepen over the next week to a dark ruby, and stands of birch add a punch of gold. Historically, the peak of fall foliage at Hawk Mountain is October 15 through 25.

Between August 15 and September 30, the Sanctuary's Autumn Hawkwatch recorded 8,510 birds of prey, representing 16 different species at the world-famous raptor sanctuary, including one rarity, the Mississippi Kite.

The total includes 6,412 Broad-winged Hawks, the Sanctuary's most numerous migrant, as well as 900 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 352 Ospreys and 111 Bald Eagles.

Other species already seen and many continuing to pass American kestrels, Cooper's Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, Merlins, Peregrine Falcons, Black and Turkey vultures, Red-shouldered Hawks, and three Golden Eagle and one Northern Harrier

During October the most numerous migrant will be the Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. Both birds are from the group called accipiters, fast-flying hawks with short, rounded wings and rudder-like tails, ideal for maneuvering through forests at top speed. An average 4,430 Sharp-shinned Hawks pass Hawk Mountain each season, and counts of 300 or more are possible on windy days.

By mid-month, the three species of North American falcons will join the flight: the once-endangered Peregrine Falcon, the medium-sized Merlin, and the colorful but tiny American Kestrel. Hawkwatchers also will have an opportunity to spot rarely-seen birds such as the Northern Harrier, and our third Accipiter, the elusive Northern Goshawk.

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary is a prime observation point for autumn raptor migration because of its location along the easternmost edge of the Appalachian Mountains what ornithologists call the 'Appalachian flyway.' When wind hits ridge, favorable updrafts carry hawks aloft, offering an effortless 'ride' as the birds follow the Appalachians south.

In addition to hawks, other migrants follow the same route, including hummingbirds, monarch butterflies, songbirds and waterfowl. This month, the red-headed woodpecker, cedar waxwing, and American goldfinch are expected to pass, as well as large flocks of blue jays and skeins of Canada geese.

Visitors to Hawk Mountain should wear sturdy shoes, stay on the trail at all times, dress in layered clothing, carry binoculars or rent them on-site, and bring a light lunch in a carry-in, carry-out daypack. Bottled drinks and light snacks are available for purchase in the Visitor Center.

Trails are open daily, from dawn until dusk and Hawk Mountain members always are admitted free of charge. Memberships begin at \$35 and are renewed annually. Trail fees on autumn weekends cost \$7 for adults and seniors, and \$3 for children ages 6 to 12. Prices are reduced on weekdays.

The official Autumn Hawkwatch continues through December 15, and is the longest-running hawkwatch in the world. For more information on the autumn migration count or upcoming events, call the info line at 610-756-6000 x7, or visit www.hawkmountain.org.