

The Kittatinny Ridge

A raptor migration superhighway

Each autumn, many North American **raptors** – birds of prey, including hawks, eagles, falcons, and vultures – migrate in search of food to survive the winter months. This journey often ends thousands of miles south of their summer breeding grounds. **The Kittatinny Ridge**, known locally as the “Blue Mountain,” plays a critical role in guiding and powering these long-distance flights.

As the southernmost major ridge in the Appalachian Ridge and Valley Province, the Kittatinny is a raptor migration superhighway. The mountain serves as a ‘road map,’ pointing migrating raptors away from the coast toward their wintering grounds. At the same time, it generates winds – waves of air known as **updrafts** and rising columns of warm air called **thermals** – that help them conserve energy as they fly. Lastly, the ridge’s vast stretches of forest provide important **stopover sites** – habitat for migrating birds to rest and refuel.

Sharp-shinned Hawk



We're on the lookout

for volunteer hawk watchers!

Whether you are an experienced birder or just enjoy being outdoors, **we could use your help** at the Bake Oven Knob Hawk Watch! Here's how you can get involved each August through November:

Be an Observer!



Help our hawk counters locate migrating raptors from two scenic lookouts on the ridge. This volunteer role is great for birders of all ages and experience levels.

Be a Counter!



Sign up for a weekend shift at the hawk watch to count and record migrating raptors. This volunteer role is for more experienced hawk watchers.

Bake Oven Knob Hawk Count

Every Autumn Since 1961!



Situated along the Appalachian Trail within PA State Game Lands 217, **Bake Oven Knob** is a popular overlook on the crest of the Kittatinny Ridge above Heidelberg Township, Lehigh County. Each year, thousands of people flock to the Knob to experience its stunning vistas and natural wonders. But did you know that it's also home to one of the world's longest continually-running migratory bird of prey studies?

We invite you to learn more and get involved!

Contact Lehigh Gap Nature Center

at mail@lgnc.org or 610-760-8889 to learn more. Thank you for your support!



Raptor Conservation at Bake Oven Knob

Once upon a time, before their ecological importance was well understood, birds of prey were considered **vermin** – threats to livestock, pets, and even *children*. It was believed that the only good raptor was a dead one. Bake Oven Knob, like other prominent overlooks on the Kittatinny Ridge, was a well-known raptor hunting site due to its location along a major migratory route.

Perceptions of raptors eventually changed. As scientists began to recognize their value as apex predators, concerned conservationists fought for their protection. In 1934, conservation advocate Rosalie Edge established **Hawk Mountain Sanctuary** – the world’s first raptor sanctuary – west of Bake Oven Knob. Hawk Mountain immediately began efforts to *count* raptors instead of kill them.

Hawk Mountain curator Maurice Broun later trained volunteer “ridge runners” to establish hawk watches at other hunting sites along the ridge. Among those volunteers was local ornithologist **Donald S. Heintzelman**, who initiated an autumn hawk count at Bake Oven Knob in 1961. Over 800,000 migrating raptors have since been counted at this site, now known officially as the **Bake Oven Knob Hawk Watch**.

Today, raptors are fully protected by state and federal law. And, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Bake Oven Knob Hawk Count continues each August through November under the leadership of **Lehigh Gap Nature Center**, a conservation nonprofit based near Slatington, PA.



Why We Count

Because birds are some of the best **indicators of environmental health**, understanding how they’re doing can tell us a lot.

Counting birds over time allows scientists to study their migratory patterns, track their populations, and understand the threats they face. Population declines observed at hawk watches after World War II were key to discovering that the pesticide DDT was harming certain bird species, including Bald Eagles. This led to the ban of DDT in the U.S. and the recovery of impacted bird populations. Hawk watches were key to this conservation success story.



All of the migratory raptor data collected at the Bake Oven Knob Hawk Watch are shared with the **Hawk Migration Association**, an international organization that manages records from hundreds of hawk watches across the continent. Our observations at Bake Oven Knob have a global impact.

What We Count

Of the **19 raptor species** recorded at Bake Oven Knob since 1961, the following are most commonly seen:

- Broad-winged Hawk
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper’s Hawk
- American Goshawk
- Northern Harrier
- Bald Eagle
- Golden Eagle
- Osprey
- American Kestrel
- Merlin
- Peregrine Falcon
- Black Vulture
- Turkey Vulture



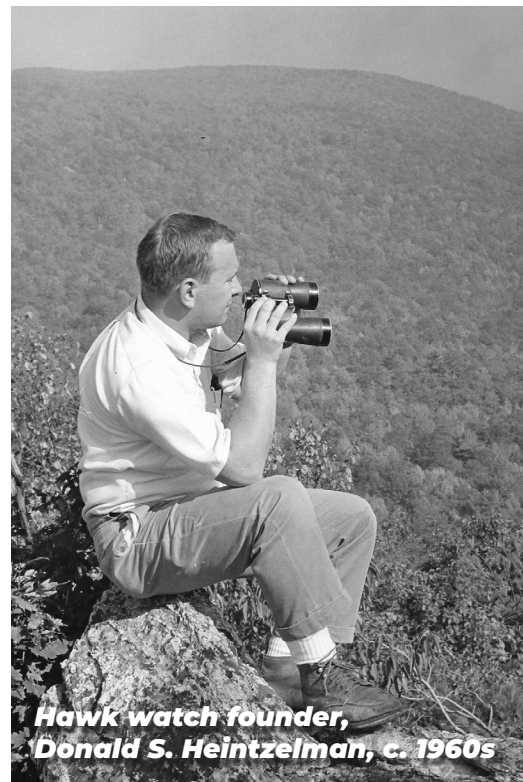
We also officially count **monarch butterflies!**



Visit bit.ly/BOK_Count or scan the QR code to view our latest sightings.



Raptor hunting at Bake Oven Knob, 1950
(credit: Nelson Hoy)



Hawk watch founder, Donald S. Heintzelman, c. 1960s