

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

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Points to Consider Before Visiting the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

1. This site is the western most full-time migration counting point in Pennsylvania. Raptors, which includes hawks, eagles, falcons, vultures, accipiters, etc., are counted as they meander along the spine of the Appalachians. The number of birds seen varies greatly from day-to-day and hour-to-hour. The raptor flight is heavily influenced by weather. A wind from the East tends to push raptors towards the mountain, causing them to fly directly over the site, thus giving a spectacular display. Winds without an eastern component usually results in less birds and views that are less memorable. Regardless of the wind, we have no control of the flight, so if you visit, understand that you may see many birds, or you may see no birds at all. Remember that east winds and sun usually result in productive flights, while west winds are much less productive. Also remember that raptors do not fly in the rain!
2. The site is kept in a natural state to help preserve its delicate ecosystem and microclimate. The terrain is relatively flat, but the ground is uneven, causing tripping hazards. Care should be taken with children and those with mobility issues. A handicap parking spot is available and hawkwatching can be conducted from inside the vehicle if necessary. A portable restroom is available although it not handicapped equipped.
3. A hawkcounter staffs the site seven days a week during migration season (weather permitting) and is responsible for spotting, identifying, and recording raptors that are migrating through the area. These records are sent to several organizations who use them to compile data on their populations and movements. Other hawkwatchers using binoculars to help the counter spot the raptors, usually stating the phrase, "Bird!" If you would like to participate, please ask the counter for his or her preferences when helping to spot birds.
4. Birds fly everywhere in the sky...sometimes close overhead...sometimes far out in the valley. If it is hazy, it can be difficult to spot the birds. If you are a beginner, don't become frustrated if someone calls a bird and you have trouble finding it. Stick with it and your brain will eventually reorient to picking out shapes in the haze. Allegheny Front has some of the most experience hawkwatchers, so relax, listen to their instructions, and enjoy the experience.
5. Birds do not fly when it is raining, therefore the hawk watch will be closed during days of inclement weather. If it is not raining at home, it may be raining at the Allegheny Front, so always check the weather before visiting. And remember that the weather can turn unpleasant quickly. Not dressing appropriately can result in an unpleasant experience. Our recommendation is to bring warmer clothing that you think you should. Trust us on this one!
6. Another word on weather...it is unpredictable here. Expect it to be colder and windier than most areas in the region. Again...bring extra clothes to deal with the weather. If it is sunny, you will burn on the mountain more than back home, so sun protection in the form of sunscreen, long sleeves, and a hat are recommended.
7. Visitors are invited to bring chairs, blankets, and food to make a non-alcoholic picnic. We are a pack-it-in—pack-it-out facility, meaning that you are expected to take home everything you bring. Pets are permitted, but owners are responsible for the behavior of their animal. Dogs must be leashed, must not scare the wildlife, and if they have a bodily function, the owner must clean up after them. This must be packed out since we do not have garbage service at the site. Also remember that loud noises can cause raptors to fly out of our range, so we ask visitors to keep quiet and keep their pets from being loud.