

Hawk Watching Season is Here

by Phil Brown, Raptor Observatory Coordinator

The fall hawk watching season is a most exciting time of year at our staffed raptor observatories in Concord and Peterborough. And it's not only birds that find their wings here...

September 1st marks the start of another season for NH Audubon's raptor observatories, Carter Hill Orchard in Concord and Pack Monadnock Mountain at Miller State Park in Peterborough. Last year brought record numbers of migrants to both sites, with the most noticeable jump occurring at Carter Hill, where over 4,000 individual birds and many all-time high counts were observed in the site's third year of counting. Pack once again reached the 10,000 mark, recording high counts of six species including Osprey, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon in the site's sixth consecutive year. For Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory's final report, please go to the following link: www.nhaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Pack-Final-Report-2010.pdf

As in past years, 2011 will feature the release of rehabilitated raptors to the open skies at both observatories, allowing visitors to see these magnificent birds up close and learn about their life histories as they begin their southbound journeys. But not only birds will find their wings here...thousands of visitors, including hundreds of students from across the state and beyond, will gather this fall at our observatories to see, hear, and touch nature. The conservation message we teach in all of our programs will stick with many of them and become a way of life. This year, our naturalists at Carter Hill will be teaching raptor identification on-site in Saturday morning workshops, with both a classroom and field component. In addition, all third-grade classes from Concord area public schools will attend similar programs at the site to learn about the importance of raptors and monitoring. School groups from across New England will return to Pack Monadnock to focus their binoculars on overhead hawks - and maybe even an eagle - while staff naturalists teach them about migration over our skies.

But hawk-watching isn't just for kids. Several of NH Audubon's Chapters will stake out their favorite perches at our observatories on their annual field trips and many new 'hawk watchers' will be made. In addition, we'll hope to best our records by counting ALL bird species during the annual Observatory Big Sit on October 9 - we can use your help!



Julie Brown and Chris Martin preparing for the hawk release at Pack Monadnock, September 2009. Photo by Phil Brown

There are many reasons to get involved and support the Observatories' successful education and research programs. Come to witness and learn about the spectacle of raptor migration, view the incredible fall foliage from Pack Monadnock's summit, savor the flavor of the season late into fall at Carter Hill, and be part of one of autumn's greatest ancient traditions.

Observatory volunteers are dedicated individuals whose reasons for assisting the programs include all of these, as well as their own. Our growing list of supporters continues to generously fund staff naturalist positions and programs. We hope to count you among one or both of these groups this fall.

Support for the observatories is made possible by grants from the Kingsbury Foundation, The Benjamin Couch Trust, community sponsors, and private donors. To make a contribution to these premier research and education programs, please contact Phil Brown at pbrown@nhaudubon.org or at 224-9909x334. We'll see you where the hawks fly!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

Raptor Releases at Pack Monadnock & Carter Hill Raptor Observatories:

Pack Monadnock: Saturday, September 17, 1pm (rain date: September 24)

Carter Hill: Sunday, September, 18, 1pm (rain date: September 25)

Big Sit Events: Sunday, October 9, 9am-5pm at Pack Monadnock & Carter Hill (in addition to Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge, see Ammonoosuc Chapter listings on page 14)