



## Arizona's Raptor Experience, LLC

September 2017

~Newsletter~

*Greetings from Chino Valley!*

*We hope you are well and enjoying the cooler evenings and monsoon rains. Autumn is definitely on its way as are many birds. We've been delighted to see a Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager and Yellow Warbler, although fleetingly, as they make their way south.*

*Hawks are on the move as well. Each year at the beginning of September we have been lucky to see large groups of Swainson's Hawks gathering and riding the thermals as they make their way as far south as Argentina where grasshoppers and warm weather will be in abundance.*

*In this issue we will be focusing on the hawk migration and where **you** can witness the spectacle of thousands of hawks in the sky. Also, get outdoors!*

*Enjoy!*

*Join us and the birds next month at*

*Jay's Bird Barn*

[www.jaysbirdbarn.com](http://www.jaysbirdbarn.com)

*October 26<sup>th</sup> in Flagstaff*

*October 27<sup>th</sup> in Sedona*

*October 28<sup>th</sup> in Prescott*

*11 a.m. – 2 p.m.*

*We'd love to see you!!*

*Bring your camera.*

## *Magical Moments...Witnessing the Hawk Migration*



Each time we drive into town Paul and I search the tops of telephone poles, fence posts, trees and fields hoping to spot one of our local raptor species. Twice now since moving to AZ, a trip to town in early September has resulted in an even more exciting find: a large kettle of Swainson's Hawks beginning the migration south to spend the winter in warm temperatures dining on an abundance of grasshoppers in places like Argentina. These are not our first experiences with the hawk migration. In fact, we used to live under a major spring migration route in upstate New York where thousands of birds could be seen moving along the Ontario shoreline for three months of the year. The most surprising thing about this migration was that the vast majority of people living along the lake

never knew the hawk migration was taking place. All they had to do was look up! So, imagine, if there were a place you could go to see thousands, or even a hundred thousand hawks migrating overhead, would you go? I say add a new item to your bucket list - travelling to see the hawk migration!

Twice a year, in the spring and fall, many species of birds take to the skies in incredibly large numbers to migrate. In fact, their numbers are so great in some instances they actually show up on radar! Some are more visible to us than others, like Canada Geese in their traditional "V" or Snow Geese that congregate by the tens of thousands at resting grounds along the way. Some however, are not visible at all like many songbirds that migrate at night, perhaps to avoid predation. Regardless, in the mind of a "hawk junkie" like me, there is no match for the spectacle of thousands of hawks riding a thermal and streaming off in single file as they reach the top and effortlessly glide in search of the next column of rising heat.

In the magical places where the migrating birds are funneled over a particular land feature such as towering mountains or diverted by great bodies of water, they can be viewed and more importantly, counted. Yes! The individual birds are counted – and their species and sometimes their sex, and even age are noted as well. The people who do this, hawk watchers/counters, are a rare breed of bird watcher. They must be experts at identification, near professional

meteorologists (weather has a huge impact on hawk migration) and incredibly dedicated hardy souls who spend time in biting winds and precipitation, bone chilling cold (especially during the spring migration) and they must be good with people. Above all, patience is paramount. However, when the conditions are right and the birds are on the move, the reward is great. Hawk watchers live for the days when it seems there are too many birds to count.

So what happens to the data collected by hawk watchers? It is gathered by The Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMAMA) ([www.hmana.org](http://www.hmana.org)) which is a member organization that is committed to the conservation of raptors through the scientific study, enjoyment, and appreciation of raptor migration. HMANA maintains an on-line database of over 200 hawk watch sites in North America. Here in Arizona, there are four hawk watch locations including the Aubrey Cliffs, two sites along Grand Canyon and the Tubac Hawk Watch. To find the nearest hawk watch site for you, visit <http://www.hmana.org/hawk-watch-sites/> where you can search by state.

Hawk watch sites are open to the public. Some are associated with nature centers and some are simply on platforms in a park. Hawk watchers or other volunteers are there to help you see and identify birds flying through. Many offer other hawk related educational opportunities as well. A few well-known hawk watch sites around the country include (you'll have to check when the migration occurs at each site):

- Braddock Bay Raptor Research in New York ([www.BBRR.org](http://www.BBRR.org)) (Our old stomping grounds!)
- Cape May in New Jersey ([www.njaudubon.org](http://www.njaudubon.org))
- Corpus Christi in Texas run by Hawk Watch International ([www.hawkwatch.org](http://www.hawkwatch.org))
- Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania ([www.hawkmountain.org](http://www.hawkmountain.org))

If international travel is a possibility, the Veracruz River of Raptors in Cardel, Mexico features the world's largest concentration of migrating raptors (4-6 million in the fall) that originate in North America and spend the non-breeding season in middle and South America. Tours to Veracruz are offered by both HMANA and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. More information can be found on their websites.

***Regardless of where your travels may take you...don't forget to look up!***

## ***Get Outdoors!***

Outdoors: noun 1. Any area outside buildings or shelter, typically away from human habitation.

Spend time outdoors - what a nifty idea. Yet, that's just what we parents, grandparents and great grandparents did a lot of in the 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's and yes, even the 80's. Absent today's omnipresent distractions of smart phones, tablets, Play Station and all manner of social media such as Gmail, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Tweets is it any surprise that when it comes to physical activity, 19 is the new 60?

That's according to a study published in June by John Hopkins Prof. Vadim Zipunnikov which examined data from 12,500 people who wore tracking devices for a week. The good professor concluded, "Activity levels at the end of adolescence were alarmingly low and by age 19, they were comparable to 60-year-olds."

In elementary school, a quarter of the boys and half the girls weren't getting even a single hour of "moderate-to-vigorous activity" each day. Those figures get even worse by ages 12 to 19. You could say that American kids reach their Geritol years before they're old enough to drink.

Growing up decades ago, we were told to "Go play outside." I fondly recall hunting, fishing, trapping, archery, fort-building, hockey, playing backyard baseball and football, wrestling matches, mowing lawns, and working on neighbor's farms every summer and fall. By contrast, today's helicopter parents, and soccer moms and house dads cram their kid's free time with after school Mandarin or violin lessons, fencing and gymnastics while the kids are glued to their tablets in the back seat. Gone are the days of milk and Twinkies and outside play until supper around the family dinner table.

While playing after school tag in a gym, shooting hoops, or participating in organized sports may lack the intellectual appeal of Mandarin lessons, it does build crucial skills like focus, creativity and leadership. Physical games help kids solve their own arguments and organize a situation, an early lesson in project management - only fun.

Activity is also good for kids' mental health. Peter Gray, psychology prof. at Boston College and author of 'Free to Learn', says that as play has declined, kids have become more anxious and depressed. He adds that when adults

take over more of kids' time, they lose their "locus of control" – driving them, teaching them, watching them may have negative consequences. During free play, the kids make the rules and decisions – and there's the connection between happiness and feeling in control of life.

The American Academy of Pediatrics in 2014, suggested that children and teens should get no more than two hours a day of screen time including cellphones, tablets and social media. Furthermore, also in 2014, the Centers for Disease Control admonished that American children need 60 minutes of moderate to intense activity a day.

*Last Child in the Woods* author Richard Louv (2006) discusses saving our children from nature-deficit disorder. Profound social upheaval and economic changes in Western culture have greatly impacted society and our once intimate relationship with nature in the past century. Americans have largely lost their senses and sensibilities. Adults have compromised their kid's soundtrack of natural sounds that rural children experienced instead replacing them with an electrified, electronic life: television, computers, digital stuff and the like.

As Mr. Louv carefully explains, time outdoors can make kids healthier, happier, smarter – and more inclined to conservation. It just makes sense. Living near or on farms, keeping pets, skinning a knee, eating a little dirt subjects young ones to bacteria and reduces the likelihood of autoimmune and allergic illness. Kids that explore nature and have control are shown to be happier overall than their 'caged indoors' counterparts. Nature allows kids to imagine and create thus inching their intelligence above their 'enclosed peers.' This equals higher IQ's, better health and a lower BMI (body mass index = fat!), greater confidence and happiness. Every parent or caretaker should desire these outcomes for their kids! But do they, in fact?

As our very dear friend and acclaimed conservationist/writer Bill Hilts, sr. from upstate NY titled his 2005 editorial in a national bear magazine, "The Kids are the Future", laments the precipitous decline in young hunter conservationists due to political meddling and technological distractions. American youth whom hunt and love the outdoors are the future wildlife protectors and voters who will work to conserve America's rapidly dwindling habitat and vital natural resources. More than ever, America needs informed, committed and responsible youth.

Amidst the generous evidence that children and adults too, need to spend more time in the outdoors how do we do it? Well, if you can make time to perform



daily living functions e.g. eating, studying, working, shopping, reading, sleeping then schedule **at least one hour each day** outdoors and above all, leave that ridiculous cellphone inside! Disconnect from distractions in order to reconnect with yourself and Nature. Carry an epipen if you must, but above all just get outdoors.

(Postscript: as a seasoned hunter, naturalist, falconer and educator, I have lived a full and rich sporting life, and have spent the past 35 years in classrooms and colleges encouraging young people to get outdoors to participate rather than merely spectate. Here in AZ, Anne and I now use our backgrounds to introduce young and old alike to the amazing world of raptors, conservation techniques, human overpopulation and falconry. It's a practical message that we strive to share. We particularly appreciate and admire the older folks who bring their younger family members and friends along to experience our offerings. After all, the kids really are the future!)



The Gift of Nature and the Outdoors Prepares a Child for Life!

Photo by P. Schnell

***Featured photos:***



**Burrowing Owl at Zanjero Park, Gilbert, AZ by Paul Schnell**



**“Osprey Fishing” by our friend and conservationist, retired NYS Supreme Court Judge and wildlife photographer Joe Forma of Erie County, NY**