

A **HIKER** pauses to take in the view from atop Bake Oven Knob on the Lehigh-Berks counties line in this 2008 file photo.

Rob Kandel
The Morning Call



DONALD S. HEINTZELMAN

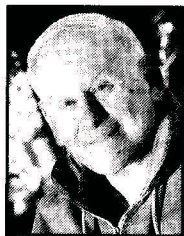
Natural treasure deserves federal recognition

The Kittatinny-Shawangunk Ridge and Corridor is a relatively unbroken ridge that extends for 250 miles across parts of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It begins at Rosendale, N.Y. at the northern end of the spectacular Shawangunk Ridge, crosses New Jersey into Pennsylvania at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and the recently established Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge, and continues in Pennsylvania nearly to the Maryland border.

Along its gently curving paths are spectacular geologic features including famous rivers — the Delaware, Lehigh, Little Schuylkill and Susquehanna — and the water gaps through which they flow. There also are wind gaps, boulder fields and other landscape features.

For more than 75 years, ornithologists, hawk watchers, birders, and nature lovers have observed, studied and photographed autumn hawk migrations. Hawk Mountain is the most famous of the watch sites, but other equally important sites include Bake Oven Knob on the Carbon-Lehigh counties border and Waggoner's Gap on the Cumberland-Perry counties border. From 10,000 to 20,000 migrating raptors of 16 species are counted every autumn. Among them are bald eagles and rarer golden eagles, sometimes called the King of Birds.

In addition to being a migration flight-line, the Kittatinny-Shawangunk Ridge and Corridor provides vital stopover habitats for migrating raptors and forest songbirds on their arduous migrations. These stopover habitats are the avian version of rest stops along highways. They are vital to the birds' survival during one of the most stressful and dangerous periods in their lives.



In 2007, I wrote a Morning Call op-ed piece, "Raptor flyway deserves broad protections." Since then I've assembled a working group of experienced professionals and developed a special project whose purpose is to have Secretary of the Interior Salazar designate the ridge and corridor as the Kittatinny-Shawangunk National Raptor Migration Corridor. This would be the first time that citizens are calling upon their government to formally recognize one of the world's most famous and important bird migration flight-lines and corridors as a national bird migration corridor.

All that is being requested is putting a prestigious national name to this ridge. By doing so, we will have an important new conservation advocacy tool that can be used to seek increased protection and preservation of habitat, farmland and open space on the ridge and within the adjacent corridor.

Currently, 223 agencies, non-profit organizations, companies, and individuals endorse this effort. Among them are the Allentown Hiking Club, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Heidelberg Township supervisors, Keystone Trails Association, Lehigh Valley Audubon Society, Lehigh Gap Nature Center, Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History. On May 9, International Migratory Bird Day, we will announce more details. Then in late June or early July, we will ask Secretary Salazar to designate this magnificent ridge and corridor as the Kittatinny-Shawangunk National Raptor Migration Corridor.

If we are successful, wildlife conservation history will be made. The world's first national raptor migration corridor will be formally created by the U.S. government. The Kittatinny-Shawangunk National Raptor Migration Corridor, a treasured landscape, finally will receive long overdue and appropriate federal recognition.

Donald S. Heintzelman of Zionsville is a professional ornithologist with 50 years of studying hawk migrations in Pennsylvania, and observing and photographing wildlife in many parts of the world. He is the author of 22 books.

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