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**N** Nothing expresses "migratory" more than birds, which cover great distances and follow seasonal shifts in light, temperature and — in the case of raptors — the availability of prey. And nothing supports bird migration more than large, connected stretches of land that provide suitable areas for nesting, breeding, feeding and much-needed stopovers.

The Shawangunk Mountains — together with the geologically linked Kittatinny Mountains of New Jersey and, further south, the Blue Ridge Mountains — make up such an area. Stretching from Harrisburg, Pa., to Rosendale, this mountainous corridor is part of the larger northern Appalachian region and a renowned flyway for tens of thousands of birds of prey, as well as forest songbirds.

### **Following routes**

The fall migration of birds of prey is a dramatic phenomenon that residents of the Hudson Valley can enjoy along the many mountain ridges of the Shawangunks and Kittatinny — one of the largest eastern hotspots for raptor migration and raptor watching.

From August through December, at least 14 different species of hawks, falcons and eagles and two species of vultures pass through on their annual southward journey to their wintering



Nesting peregrine falcons.

Photo courtesy of Richard Goldstone

grounds. Some of these raptors are short-distance migrants; others hail from the eastern regions of Canada and the United States but travel thousands of miles to Central and South America every year.

Although the fall migration occurs over an extended period of time, a few species migrate throughout the entire season. The remarkable aerial parade begins with ospreys and broad-winged hawks early in the fall, followed by American kestrels, merlins and peregrine falcons. By mid-September, sharp-shinned hawks and Cooper's hawks are also on the

move through the region. Early October marks the beginning of red-shouldered hawk flight, with the red-tailed hawk coming soon after. By mid-October, vultures, rough-legged hawks and northern goshawks can be seen. From that time until the beginning of December, golden eagles also appear in significant numbers.

While each bird's place of origin may vary, once thing is certain: These magnificent birds have been following the same migration paths for thousands of