

Raptor flyway deserves broad protections

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More than 50 years ago, I began my intimate involvement in raptor migration and other wildlife research and conservation of the famous Kittatinny Ridge (Blue Mountain) that forms the northern border of Berks, Lehigh, and Northampton counties. In 1956, my first activities involved assisting the late Maurice Broun, Hawk Mountain's legendary first curator, in helping to stop the illegal raptor shooting every autumn upridge and downridge from that famous wildlife sanctuary.

After the widespread hawk shooting was stopped in 1957, I slowly turned by attention to raptor migration research. Thus, in 1961, I organized the first annual Bake Oven Knob Hawk Watch at the geologically prominent landmark about 16 miles upridge from Hawk Mountain on the Kittatinny Ridge and several miles north of Germansville in Lehigh County. Mid-August of this year marks the beginning of the 47th annual raptor migration count and study at that spectacular site—a project that now is sponsored and coordinated by Dan Kunkle working with an intern and qualified volunteers from the Lehigh Gap Nature Center based near Slatington, Pennsylvania.

This is one of the world's longest, continually running ornithological research programs. The long-term data base resulting from that nearly half-century of work is providing insights into a wide range of important phenomena, including hard facts (age ratios and counts) documenting the recovery of former federally endangered bald eagles and trends in certain raptor populations. This includes what appear to be 10- to 12-year cycles in American Kestrel populations, and numerous other pertinent scientific and conservation concerns.

Over the past half century, however, I've also seen an increasing trend toward undesirable and unwise development on some of the slopes of the Kittatinny Ridge where, for example, a sports car race track and additional ski slopes and housing are planned and moving through the regulatory process, although being opposed by several local environmental protec-



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tion organizations.

Dan Kunkle, executive director of the Lehigh Gap Nature Center, comments on some of these matters in the Summer 2007 issue of *Wildlife Activist*, the newsletter of that organization. He suggests correctly that a bold approach now is needed to assure the long-term conservation protection of that internationally important ridge and corridor by the state and federal government.

In 1992, I launched The Kittatinny Raptor Corridor Project, which continues at the Lehigh Gap Nature Center. In addition, in that year, I also published proposals for state and national conservation designations for this very important mountain in the form of a Kittatinny National Raptor Flyway from the U. S. Department of the Interior and a Kittatinny-Shawangunk Interstate Park crossing parts of New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. Indeed, in 1993, I expanded an idea proposed by the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development Inc., that a United Nations Biosphere Reserve be designated for the entire length of the Kittatinny-Shawangunk Ridge and Corridor as it crosses these states.

Regretfully, all of these innovative and creative proposals fell on deaf ears among most state and federal officials. Most authorities, especially in Pennsylvania, failed to grasp the long-term conservation significance of the proposals, and were too timid to boldly move forward. I hope governmental attitudes now are more astute and progressive. Perhaps now is the time to give very serious re-examination to these recommendations and turn them into conservation realities that will assure for centuries the essential wildlife and landscape conservation status of the Kittatinny-Shawangunk Ridge and Corridor.

Indeed, I join with Dan Kunkle and the Lehigh Gap Nature Center, in calling on all interested and concerned persons, organizations, and agencies within Pennsylvania, and in New Jersey and New York — and even the federal government and United Nations — to act promptly and vigorously to make certain the Kittatinny-Shawangunk Ridge and Corridor forever remains wild, and provides essential homes for the rich biodiversity that lives there year-round, or breeds or winters there, or uses the ridge and corridor as stop-over habitat. This internationally important natural treasure deserves no less.

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