

## Hawk watching at Acadia

There's something magnificent and thrilling about watching a large bird of prey riding an air current, soaring into the sky, gliding on powerful wings. This fall, join the park rangers at Acadia National Park in their ninth annual Hawkwatch to get close-up views of hundreds of hawks from the top of Cadillac Mountain.

Every day, rangers will help visitors spot and identify hawks as the birds gather and migrate south along the coast for the winter. Some species, like the sharp-shinned hawk, may only be going from Canada to Massachusetts, while others, like the osprey, may be going to Florida or even as far as South America.

As Bryant Woods, park ranger at Acadia National Park, explains, migrating birds do whatever they can to conserve energy and fly efficiently. That means they look for high-altitude wind currents. The higher they are, the farther they can go without flapping their wings. One way to reach these heights is to ride the updrafts along mountainsides. That makes Cadillac Mountain, the highest point in the park, a great spot for hawk watching.

The absolute best time to see lots of hawks, says Woods, is when the wind is blowing from the north. These north winds often come after a cold front, so look for a passing cold front, north winds and clear skies (the rangers don't go to the Hawkwatch site on rainy or foggy days). On good days, says Woods, it is reasonable to expect to see 100 or more birds in five hours, and not unusual to see two or three hundred. Also, he adds, they come close — as little as 10 or 15 yards away.

The most commonly spotted hawks are sharp-shinned hawks and American kestrels. Broad-winged hawks and ospreys might also be spotted, as well as northern harriers and red-tailed hawks. Rangers bring field guides and strongly urge visitors to bring binoculars. It's also five to ten degrees cooler at the top of the mountain, so bring jackets or sweaters.

What's so exciting about the Hawkwatch? Woods says it's a combination of "the aesthetics of beautiful and charismatic birds, the challenge of identifying birds on the wing, and the natural interest in watching animals behave." You may get hooked. Woods says people come the first time out of curiosity, and find themselves compelled to return year after year at the same time just to watch for hawks.



Ellen Kanner photo

The view from the top of Cadillac Mountain. The Hawkwatch site is an easy 200-yard walk from the eastern edge of the summit parking lot.

**What:**

Hawkwatch

**Where:**

Cadillac Mountain, Acadia National Park, Mount Desert Island

**When:**

August 24 - October 14, daily from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**How:**

Take the Park Loop Road to the top of Cadillac Mountain. The Hawkwatch site is easily visible from the east side of the Cadillac summit parking area. Walk 200 yards along the North Ridge Trail to get to the site.

**How much:**

The Hawkwatch is free. There is a \$10 per car user fee to enter Acadia National Park.

**More:**

Call Park Ranger Tony Linforth, (207) 288-8807, or visit the Acadia National Park [Web site](#) for more information.

**Still more:**

Get information and news about [Acadia](#) or check out our [Off the Maine Street](#) feature spotlighting Acadia and Mount Desert Island, including slide shows, 360-degree photos from the top of Cadillac, audio clips and more.