



Broad-wing Kettle

— Dorothy W. Crumb

TO FIND A FALL HAWK LOOKOUT

DOROTHY W. CRUMB and BELLE PEEBLES

Birders in central New York have no problem finding migrating hawks in the spring. Since most birds of prey don't fly over large bodies of water, Lake Ontario creates a natural barrier. The birds flying north hit the south shore of the lake and turn east to fly around the lake. People stationed at Derby Hill, at the southeast corner of the lake, have three or four months to enjoy this spectacle.

But what happens in the fall, when other areas are reporting large numbers of migrating Broad-winged Hawks? Over Syracuse we sometimes see one or two moving birds, and on unusual winds we might even see thirty or forty. A trip to Hawk Mountain is most enjoyable, but many times observers make the long trip to central Pennsylvania and only see rain or fog.

With the formation of the Hawk Migration Association of North America, this lack of fall birds began to be discussed more often. Reading HMANA reports, seeing dots on the maps where birds were seen in good numbers, proved that there had to be a route through central New York.

A chance look at a book written in 1897 by Rev. J. B. Wicks of Paris Hill created the final push in the right direction. To quote one sentence, "I am told that there are days in the fall of the year when the hawks assemble in such numbers that they are termed 'hawk days'."

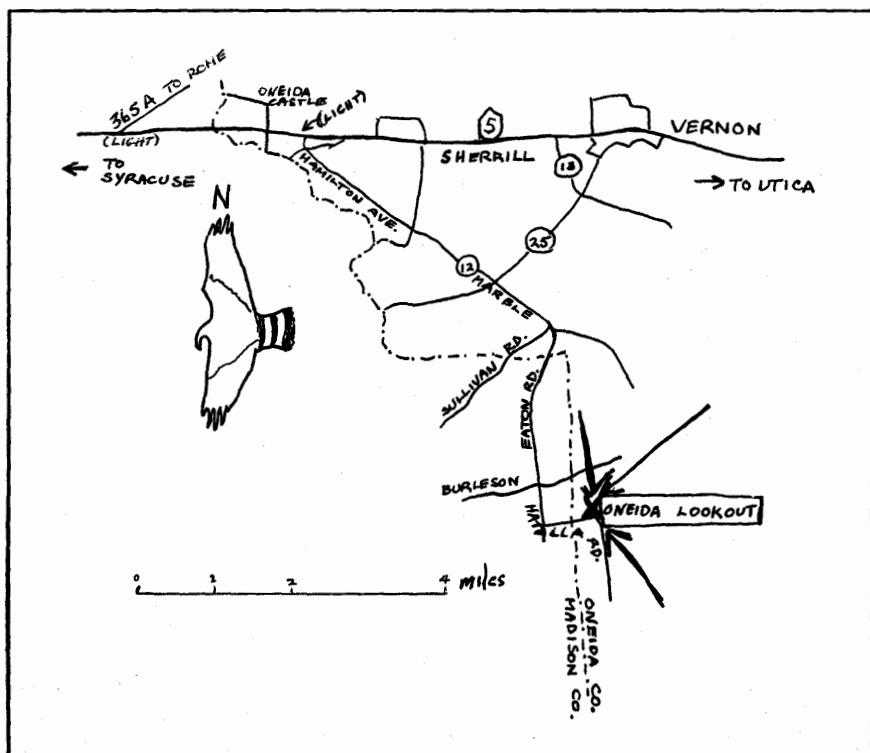
If there were once "hawk days" near Paris Hill, only about 40 miles east of Syracuse, why couldn't we find the spot? The answer must again be the lakes. If southbound birds don't want to fly over the water, they might pass east of the lake and might also want to avoid Oneida Lake which is even further east. Birds from the Adirondacks could easily funnel into the same channel.

In central New York is a series of north-south glacial hills and valleys. Most of the hilltops are approximately 1400 feet above sea level, with just a few getting as high as 1900+. After studying topographical maps, we decided to explore the area to see what kind of a view was available.

After selecting several spots and eliminating some because of high trees, we had to settle on a time. Through Hawk Migration Association people in Connecticut and the well-published records from Hawk Mountain, it was determined that the second weekend in September should be the starting date.

Then the most important problem—manpower. We called on members of the Onondaga Audubon Society and the Oneida Bird Club. This was when we found that we were a year behind time. Belle and Sheila Peebles from Oneida had the same idea in 1974. After pinpointing on the map places where they had seen concentrations of migrating hawks in past years, they had tried many sites south of Oneida and Sherrill. Hatalla Road, 5 miles southeast of Sherrill, proved to be the best place to see hawks consistently.

This location is 12 miles due west of Paris Hill where Rev. Wicks had lived. It is the ridge to the east of Oneida Creek and west of Sconondoa Creek, rising 500 to 600 feet between them to an elevation of 1420 feet. Except for a woodlot to the southwest, there is an excellent view in all directions.



On the morning of Saturday, September 13, 1975, observers were on hilltops at five- or six-mile intervals, from west of Hatalla Road and east as far as Paris Hill. Tassel Hill, the highest point in Madison County, was also covered even though it was south of other observers.

Naturally, the weather wouldn't cooperate. The winds were from the west and there was some rain. Although there were resident Red-tailed Hawks and American Kestrels obviously hunting, no lookouts reported migrating birds—with the exception of Hatalla Road with 49.

The next day, without rain and with winds from the north, several of us returned to Hatalla Road to see a total of 560 hawks, 508 of which were Broad-winged Hawks.

This ended most experimentation. All observers wanted to be where the hawks were. On one occasion, when a flock of Broad-wings was seen way to the east, a few of us crossed the Sconondoa Valley to check the next ridge, but couldn't find the birds. They were still being seen from Hatalla Road.

In 1974, the Peebles had not started watching until later in September. Their 10 days of coverage produced 569 hawks. The hill, now called the Oneida Lookout because it is just inside Oneida County, was covered for 15 days in 1975. 1,286 hawks were identified.

North winds in late August and early September, 1976, drew hopeful watchers to the lookout. Although there was some small success, it wasn't until September 12th, on west-southwest winds that the birds put on a show. 2,556 Broad-winged Hawks passed overhead—the thrilling sight we had all hoped for. The flight didn't start until 1:30 in the afternoon and was over at 4:00; two and a half hours of soaring birds that would probably be cheered again and again as they moved south over other observation points.

Complete records for the three years the Oneida Lookout has been covered are as follows:

	1974	1975	1976	1976
			30 days	
	20 hrs.	44 hrs.	111 hrs.	Peak Days
Turkey Vulture		16	6	3 Sept. 28
Goshawk	2	2	4	2 Sept. 24
Sharp-shinned Hawk	31	197	660	120 Oct. 10
Cooper's Hawk	4	32	21	6 Oct. 10
Red-tailed Hawk	67	196	283	86 Oct. 26
Red-shouldered Hawk	2	18	58	15 Oct. 17
Broad-winged Hawk	381	607	3,053	2,556 Sept. 12
Rough-legged Hawk	5	18	6	5 Nov. 2
Golden Eagle			1	Oct. 18
Marsh Hawk	13	31	61	10 Oct. 10
Osprey	1	6	36	6 Sept. 18 & 21
Merlin			2	1 Sept. 22 & 28
American Kestrel	59	119	133	51 Sept. 28
Unidentified	4	44	125	
Total	569	1,286	4,449	

In addition to the migrating raptors, there were 3,614 Canada Geese, 104 Blue Jays and 324 Common Crows, with 1,551 of the geese going through on October 10th.

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