

NEW FULL-SEASON AUTUMN HAWKWATCHES IN COASTAL TEXAS

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Abstract

Before 1997, local volunteers frequently conducted peak-season, autumn counts of migrating raptors at Smith Point on Galveston Bay, and at Hazel Bazemore Park near Corpus Christi, Texas. In 1997, HawkWatch International partnered with local organizations and volunteers to begin standardized, full-season counts at both sites. Three years of effort have since demonstrated the significance of migrations through the area. The Corpus Christi migration now stands as the largest and most diverse concentration of migratory raptors known in the United States and Canada, with annual counts ranging as high as 992,000 raptors of up to 28 species (>90% Broad-winged Hawks, *Buteo platypterus*). In comparison, though the Smith Point count averages only 25–50,000 birds, it includes relatively high numbers of accipiters, kites, and falcons. Both sites also provide excellent opportunities to monitor migrations of Swallow-tailed Kites (*Elanoides forficatus*) and Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*). Although the time span of full-season data is limited, comparisons of the seasonal and annual dynamics at each site reveal distinct differences. Corpus Christi probably draws from a broad range of eastern and midwestern flyways. Smith Point probably draws from a more limited range of eastern and southeastern flyways. The Smith Point flight also appears to be more affected by coastal weather conditions. Due to wind-related variation in flight paths, adequate coverage of the Broad-winged Hawk flight at Corpus Christi may require simultaneous peak-season counts at multiple sites along a northwest–southeast transect. Besides the scientific value, both sites also offer tremendous opportunities for public education.