



With autumn on the horizon, you can soon witness—up close and in person—billions of wings on the go in peak season. Here are six of my favorite lookouts. **By Kenn Kaufman**

Daylight is growing shorter. The crescendo of summer birdsong has quieted to a whisper. Bird populations are swollen in their ranks, and in northern forests, marathon migrators are fattening up, laying on fuel for phenomenal flights. Soon the mass exodus will be in full tilt, a movement of birds almost beyond imagination in sweep and scope.

The fall migration season is a drawn-out affair—far more protracted than the northward rush in spring. Some hummingbirds, for example, may be moving south from their breeding grounds before the end of June, and some waterfowl are still southbound at the end of December.

The routes birds follow between their nesting grounds and their wintering areas are as varied as the birds themselves. We sometimes speak of “flyways,” and a handful of species actually follow limited travel corridors. But the overwhelming majority of bird species travel on a broad front in “flyways” that may be as wide as the continent. Migrating birds probably cross every square mile of land and water in North America. So the billions of migrants are spread across millions of square miles, and the magnitude of the passage often escapes our notice.

Through an alchemy of consistent weather patterns, habitat, flight patterns, and aspects of local and regional geography, there are a few locations where exceptional numbers of birds do concentrate during their autumn journeys. This guide features a half-dozen of my favorite such sites.

These hot spots offer vantage points for watching visible migration, including the passage of birds of prey migrating overhead or seabirds skirting coastlines. Also featured are major stopover sites for songbirds, shorebirds, and others whose actual travels are often invisible to us, because they happen while we sleep or at altitudes practically unknown to man without parachute or plane. A few of the sites double as a stage for both stopover birds and soaring migrants.

So what are you waiting for? The show is already beginning. Dust off your binoculars, and get outside to try for a glimpse into one of the most remarkable phenomena in all of nature.

From top: Hawk Ridge, Duluth, Minnesota; a birdwatcher on the lookout at Cape May, New Jersey; a flock of brant at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska; sharp-shinned hawk.

