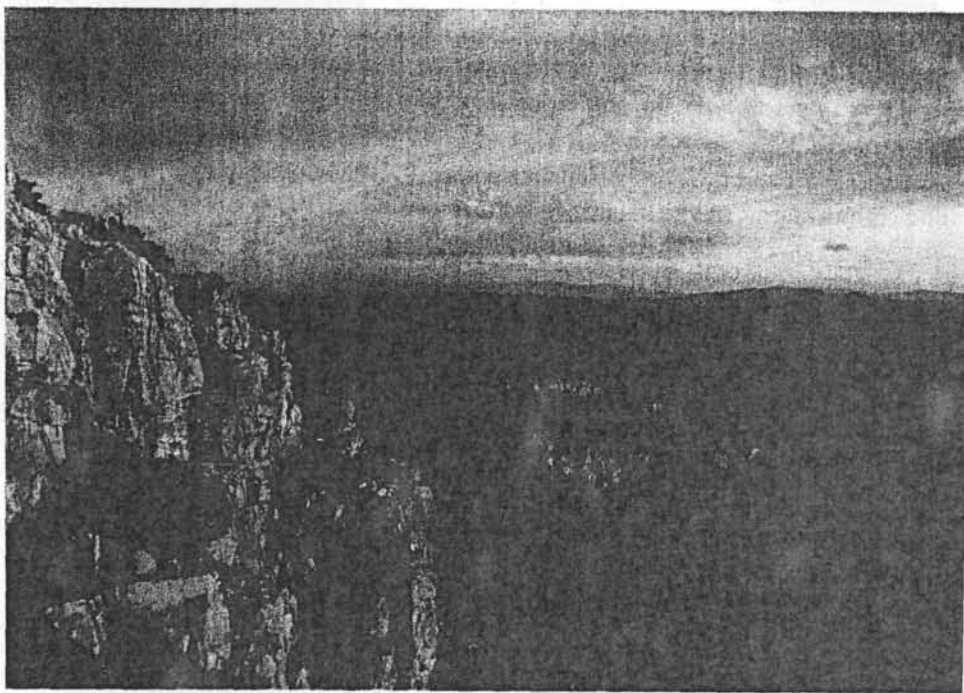


## New Partnership for Raptor Studies

An immense array of North American raptor-migration data—all of it disconnected, much of it sampled irregularly, some of it contradictory—begs for comprehensive, standardized analysis across the continent. The Ferruginous Hawk might be declining at some locations and increasing at others. Are those real differences, or sampling artifacts? The Broad-winged Hawk might be decreasing in the East, but apparent increases have been noticed along the western periphery of its migratory route. Are those true population changes, or shifts in distribution? The American Kestrel might be declining severely throughout the East. Why is its status often unclear in other regions? Recent raptor population studies have raised those and many more questions that lack adequate answers. Everyone agrees that such trends must be verified in extensive samples from many migration sites, analyzed over various time periods, and interpreted on local, regional, and continental scales to determine where and for which species conservation efforts should be directed.

A significant new venture points toward filling such gaps in knowledge. It is a research partnership announced in 2004, which unites the Hawk Migration Association of North America, the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, and HawkWatch International in a project called the Raptor Population Index. The ultimate goal of this ambitious effort is to compile and analyze migration data from a network of more than 100 count-sites across the continent. To fund it, the National Fish



For years, hawkwatches throughout North America have been amassing large amounts of quantitative data on populations of migrating raptors. But are there any large-scale patterns? Continent-wide estimates? Long-term trends? A new, inter-agency raptor-research partnership aims to examine these questions broadly and integratively. *Goshute Mountains Hawkwatch, Nevada; October 2001. © Jerry Liguori.*

and Wildlife Foundation has provided a challenge grant that is being matched by contributions from other foundations, corporations, and individuals.

Managers of the partnership described trend analyses by David J.T. Hussell, one of the team's leaders, as "the backbone of the project's scientific credentials". An expert on the use of migration counts to monitor bird populations, Hussell has already made preliminary analyses of data from two hawkwatches in the East (Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania and Cape May in New Jersey) and two in the West (the Goshute Mountains in Nevada and the Manzano Mountains in New Mexico). Among his initial findings are significant increases in the annual autumn counts of Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Merlin, and

Peregrine Falcon at both eastern sites since 1976 and in the counts of Broad-winged Hawk and Peregrine Falcon at both western sites since 1990. In contrast, Hussell said, "Recent declines in Northern Harrier, Broad-winged and Red-tailed Hawks at Hawk Mountain, American Kestrel at both eastern sites, and Ferruginous Hawk in the West should be of concern and may indicate a need for conservation action." With much more analysis at many more sites, the partnership aims to provide wildlife managers and environmental policy-makers with a basis for informed decisions about how best to prioritize raptor-conservation plans.