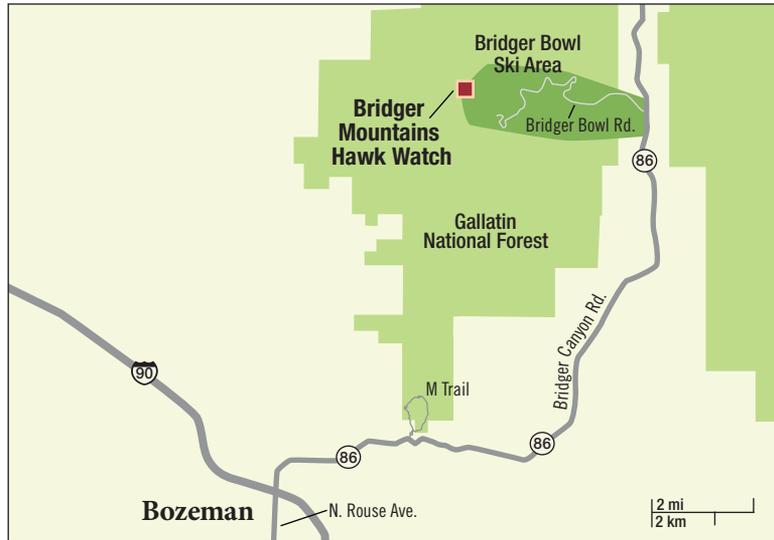


bridger mountains hawk watch

bozeman, montana

45°49'2.33"N 110°55'45.47"W



Bridger Mountains Hawk Watch is located on a ridge at an elevation of 8,520 feet. From Bozeman, take Bridger Canyon Road (Hwy. 86) 15 miles to Bridger Bowl Rd., which serves as the entrance to a ski area. Turn left and follow the road for approximately 1.5 miles to the parking area. Hike to the crest of the ridge on a jeep road and a trail.

This is the premier location in the lower 48 states for observing migrating Golden Eagles in autumn. Up to 1,800 eagles have been observed in a season, and more than 500 have been tallied in a day!

Seventeen raptor species pass through the area each autumn. The migration begins in earnest in mid-September, and non-eagle activity reaches a crescendo in late September and early October. We count the greatest number of Golden Eagles in mid-October. Bright sunshine, warm temperatures, and strong southwest winds,

which usually occur one to two days ahead of an approaching cold front, make the best conditions for seeing a large number of raptors.

I always enjoy the vigorous hike required to reach the summit and observation point, as well as the anticipation of the day's flight. One never knows what will fly by, and the 360-degree view of the surrounding mountains is awe-inspiring; it's worth the effort all by itself. Many outdoor enthusiasts visit, and I enjoy sharing the day's highlights with them.

I also love watching the resident mountain goats, and some visitors have seen black bears and cougars. — *Steve Hoffman*

sites nearby**M Trail**

Four miles east of Bozeman on Bridger Canyon Rd. Green-tailed and Spotted Towhees, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Lazuli Bunting along the trail to the big M on the southwest side of Bridger Mountain.

Battle Ridge Campground

On Bridger Canyon Rd. three miles beyond the Bridger Bowl Ski Area. Williamson's Sapsucker, MacGillivray's Warbler, Black-backed Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee.

AT A GLANCE**HABITAT**

Conifer forest interspersed with mountain meadows.

TERRAIN

Steep. The raptor-viewing point is on the concrete helipad atop Bridger Ridge, 200 feet north of the ski hut where the trail crests the ridge. Hiking distance is about two miles, and the elevation gain is 2,200 feet; allow 1.5-2 hours each way. You must be in great shape to complete the hike.

BIRDS

17 raptor species: Golden and Bald Eagles, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Northern Goshawk, Red-tailed, Rough-legged, Broad-winged, Ferruginous, and Swainson's Hawks, American Kestrel, Prairie and Peregrine Falcons, Merlin, Northern Harrier, Osprey, Turkey Vulture, Yellow-rumped, Townsend's, and Wilson's Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, White-throated Swift, Hairy Woodpecker, Clark's Nutcracker, Steller's Jay.

WHEN TO GO

Mid-September through mid-October, especially on a warm, sunny, breezy day; late morning through mid-afternoon is the best time to see raptors.

AMENITIES

Bridger Raptor Festival, October 4-6 (<http://bridgerraptorfest.org>). No amenities onsite; it's a remote, wild place.

ACCESS

National forest. No fees. The site is open throughout autumn.

TIPS

Binoculars, good hiking shoes or boots, warm clothing (and a good windbreaker), and plenty of food and drink are necessities. Prepare for snow anytime from late September into October.

FOR MORE INFO

Montana Audubon, (406) 443-3949, www.mtaudubon.org. HawkWatch International, www.hawkwatch.org. Sacajawea Audubon Society, sacajaweaaudubon.org.

www.BirdWatchingDaily.com/hotspotsmap

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We make it visible.

Steve Hoffman is executive director of Montana Audubon and founder of HawkWatch International. In 1991, he began the Bridger Mountain Raptor Migration Project.