



# Lords of the Air



Birds of prey—also known as raptors—are a very diverse group of birds known for their incredible eyesight, agility, and speed. The open skies above Little River Canyon are an excellent place for raptor-watching. Resident species hunt nearby and migrant birds follow the canyon as they have done for centuries.

Bluffs are prime migration-watching sites for birds of prey. Winds blowing against the bluff create updrafts upon which these regal birds can soar for hours. In addition to updrafts created by bluffs, raptors also use thermals. Thermals are columns of warm, rising air that has been heated by cliffs, paved roads—even parking lots.

By riding on thermals, raptors are able to conserve their energy and endure distant flights during migration. Often flying thousands of feet above, sometimes only the silhouettes of these soaring birds are visible. The best time for large numbers of raptors is September and October although some species can be seen year-round.



Bald Eagle/Walt Burch

## Eagles

Northern Alabama is home to a growing population of Bald Eagles. These majestic symbols of freedom are always a privilege to see. In late fall and early winter, Golden Eagles may also be seen at this site. Golden Eagles only visit Alabama in small numbers and tend to stay in the wildest areas of the state.



Peregrine Falcon/USFWS, Craig Koppie

## Falcons

The Peregrine Falcon is revered worldwide for its speed and incredible hunting skill. Some of these impressive birds migrate through parts of Alabama. Alabama's most common falcon is the diminutive American Kestrel, which is easily spotted hunting from roadside telephone wires.



Sharp-shinned Hawk/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Rick Kline

## Hawks

Hawks are the most diverse group of raptors in Alabama. These range in size from the tiny Sharp-shinned Hawk, which zips through the forest catching small birds, to the familiar Red-tailed Hawk which preys on squirrels and other mammals.



Turkey Vulture/USFWS, Lee Karney

## Vultures

At Little River Canyon, Black and Turkey vultures are common year-round. These birds of prey often search for dead animals by soaring and circling over small areas. Unlike most birds, Turkey Vultures have a keen sense of smell, enabling them to locate food before actually seeing it.

## It's a Bird, it's a Plane, it's a...



Turkey Vultures are large, dark birds with long tails and small heads. The wings are held in a dihedral (V-shaped).



Small hawks (Accipiters) have short, round wings and long tails. They alternate between flapping and gliding.



Large hawks (Buteos) soar with rounded wings and short, fanned tails.



Eagles are very large and have long, broad wings.



Falcons have long tails, long, pointed wings, and are powerful flyers.