Migration of hawks under way

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PORT ALLEN — Perched on a
bare limb overlooking a plowed
sugarcane field, a red-tailed hawk
waited and watched.
Possibly bored by his inactivity,
he soared into the sky and joined
several other hawks leisurely
circling in the clear, winter sky.

Sighting hawks in the Baton
Rouge area currently is simple.
Their large size and the lack of
foliage on trees make them readily
visible.

Also, Louisiana is a common
wintering area for many species
of hawks, especially the red-tailed,
red-shouldered, the American
Kestrel (sparrow hawk),
sharp-shinned, Cooper’s hawks and
other high-legged hawk species.

Said Paul McKenzie, coordinator
of a local group of hawkwatchers.

The hawks migrate here from all
over the United States and Canada.

McKenzie said. Once severe winter
weather has passed, the hawks will
begin their long trek northward
sometime in late March or April.
McKenzie said. Some may nest here
in the area or other parts of the state,
and not migrate to the North, but
most will move on and return next
winter, he said.

Most of the hawks in the area are
migratory birds, which places them
under the protection of federal
regulations, said David Moreland,
a biologist with the state Department
of Wildlife and Fisheries Game
Division.

“All migratory birds are
protected except birds like crows,
blackbirds and some sparrows,”
Moreland said.

Hawks are
defederally protected, and it’s a
federal offense to shoot them. You
also have to have a license to
capture a hawk.

Other sites to observe and count
the hawks which migrated through
this area.

Between late August and mid-
October, McKenzie said, some
10,051 hawks were observed,
primarily consisting of broadwings.
He said broadwings constitute 80
percent of the migrating hawks and
usually migrate in flocks.

The broadwings are forced
to migrate into Central America
and South America because they feed
on insects, frogs and crawfish, which
are not locally abundant during
the winter, McKenzie said.

The spring migration of the
broadwings should begin in late
March, McKenzie said. He is hoping
to generate enough interest
throughout the state to have
organized watches of the hawks as
they again migrate northward.

As for the hawks which are now
spending time in this area,
McKenzie said some may choose to
stay, but most will begin their spring
migration in March.