



INROADS Quarterly

A Publication of Newark Toyota World

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Road Trip!

Text and photos by Apryl Parcher



Above: Preparing to drive the Toyota 4-Runner up to the summit of Turkey Point State Park. **Below:** Bob Stahorn and Anne DeMott keep a tally of the hawks they identify at Turkey Point.



At Turkey Point State Park near North East, Md., hawk watching is great this time of year. I recently took a Toyota 4-Runner for a day trip down Rt. 272 to the Turkey Point Hawk Watching Site, back through the town of North East for lunch, and down to the Chesapeake City area to sample an herb garden and enjoy some light holiday shopping—a pleasant way to spend the day.

Hawk Watching

Although you don't need the 4-wheel-drive to get to the Turkey Point State Park parking area, I found the 4-Runner to be perfect for the trip. It had plenty of room, a sliding moon-roof for enjoying the fall air, and great traction on the windy road leading to the park.

According to Pat Valdata of the Cecil Bird Club, the best time to view migrating hawks at Turkey Point is between 9 a.m. and noon. I went on a Friday, and found plenty of parking spaces at the entrance to the mile-long trail that leads to the Hawk Watching Site and Turkey Point Lighthouse. The trail skirts grassy meadows and twists among black walnut trees and stands of Paw Paw, oak, hickory and chokecherry. Dotted here and there with wooden benches, the trail is an easy walk or bike-ride.

When I arrived at 11 a.m., the sky was a little overcast, which is actually not bad for hawk viewing. Cecil Bird Club volunteers Bob Stahorn and Anne DeMott had already spotted several Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks circling overhead. Standing next to a couple of weathered picnic tables at the edge of a meadow, a Plexiglas-encased observation board details the wing silhouettes and banding patterns of various hawks, falcons, vultures and other birds to give observers an idea of what to look for. Volunteers staff the site daily during the fall migration and take down information to add to the Hawk Migration Association of North America database. Turkey Point typically sees anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 birds during this period.

"We take counts from Labor Day through Thanksgiving," says Pat Valdata, who also met me at the park. Two hawks circled overhead, visible only as black silhouettes in the white sky, but even without binoculars, Valdata could identify the Sharp-shinned.

"See the butterfly-type flapping that one is doing? And look at the silhouette; the wings are set forward so its head looks much smaller, compared with the head of a Cooper's hawk," she points out.

One doesn't have to be an expert to have fun watching the fall hawk migration at Turkey Point; you just need a good set of binoculars and a willingness to learn. The Bird Club has been taking down migration observations for more than 10 years, and experienced Bird Club observers are happy to share their knowledge with beginners. For more information, visit their website at www.udel.edu/cecilbirds.

A short walk up the trail from the Hawk Watch is Turkey Point Lighthouse. Looking out over the wide expanse of the Susquehanna Flats and the rivers that converge at the head of the bay, the view from the Lighthouse is breathtaking. Hawks and other raptors that migrate along the Elk Neck Peninsula pause to rest at Turkey Point before braving the flight over the large expanse of water—which makes this a great place to observe them in numbers.



Looking and Lunch in North East

The next leg of my trip took me back into the town of North East for a spot of lunch at the Highborn Café and some shopping. You can't miss the brightly-painted Highborn Café located on the west side of Main Street just after the light at Cecil Avenue. Its bold color scheme and unique décor makes me long for the Caribbean, and was inspired by one of the owners' favorite places, Highborn Cay in the Bahamas. It's a cheery place for breakfast or lunch and their conch soup is a real treat.

Shopping in North East is easy and fun. Parking can be difficult to find right along the street, but the 4-runner's compact size and tight turning radius makes it easy to squeeze into an available spot. Even if you can't find a place on Main to park, there is plenty of municipal parking just off the street and within easy walking distance of shops like Beans; Leaves, Etc.; the Shoppes of Londonshire; The Silver Buckle; Saffron Creek and more.

Fall Veggies and Herbs

After shopping in North East, I took Rt. 40 east back to Elkton, and turned south on Rt. 213. At Baker's Restaurant on Locust Point Road, I took a right and drove to Detwiler's Farm Market to pick up some produce. The Detwiler family started the farm market out of their garage some 13 years ago and later expanded to the current roadside stand with a wider array of goods. Wooden furniture, flowering kale, bright mums and pumpkins are arranged outside the spacious open-air market and greenhouses. Inside you can find all kinds of locally-grown fresh vegetables, in-season fruit, flowers, canned goods, and even farm-fresh eggs and butter. The 4-runner made stocking up on veggies and a few bright Cinderella pumpkins a snap with the easy lift and automatic close feature on the rear hatch-back door.

Next on the agenda was a visit to nearby Sinking Springs Herb Farm on Elk Forest Road. Continuing west on Locust Point Road, you can get to Sinking Springs by making a left on McKeown Road, which ends at Elk Forest. Take a right there, and Sinking Springs is a short distance up on the right. The long gravel drive is easy to miss, so keep a sharp eye out for the small "Herb Farm" sign.

Splashes of yellow goldenrod and tiny purple faces of morning glories can be seen among the twisted, brown stalks of dry corn on the approach to the 130-acre herb farm. Owners Ann and Bill Stubbs run a country cottage bed and breakfast, host herbal luncheons at their restored 18th century provincial plantation log house, and offer herbal craft and other programs. Learn how to make "Sweet Annie" wreaths and swags, natural Christmas Santas, and many other herbal decorations at Anne's fragrant gift shop, or enjoy guided herbal tours and lectures. The historic farm house is tucked away beneath the spreading limbs of a giant sycamore tree that sprouted more than 400 years ago. There is always something blooming at Sinking Springs, which is worth a visit at every season.



Above: Christine Parcher after shopping at the Silver Buckle in North East, Md. **Below, from left:** Edith Stubbs at Sinking Springs Herb Farm, owned and operated by Ann and Bill Stubbs; Loading up on Cinderella pumpkins at Detwiler's Farm Market; Joanna Detwiler arranges apples at her family's Farm Market, which has been in business in Elkton for 13 years.



Shopping in Canal Town

From Sinking Springs it's only four miles to the Chesapeake City Bridge on Rt. 213. I usually take a short cut off of Elk Forest at Spears Hill Road, which enters Rt. 213 just before the approach to the C&D Canal Bridge.

My "shopping local" experience had to include Chesapeake City, where several unique shops offer a wealth of goodies from antiques to gourmet chocolates, and where great restaurants and B&Bs abound (see

www.chesapeakecity.com). Visiting Near-n-Far Gifts on Charles Street was the perfect way to end the day. Tucked away under the bridge, the beautiful yellow shop is surrounded by blooming plants and whimsical garden décor. Inside is a treasure trove of hand crafted articles from around the corner and around the world—paintings by local artists, finger puppets from South America, kaleidoscopes, jewelry, gourmet doggie biscuits and chocolates you can sample—it definitely requires multiple visits to take in all this shop (and the town) has to offer.

The handy 4-runner took this Cecil road trip in stride, offering me a pleasant, comfortable drive along the way, which totaled close to 100 miles across New Castle and Cecil County. Even my 11-year-old son was impressed. When I stopped to pick him up at school on the way back, he got very excited. He enjoyed the comfort of the 4-runner's suspension and its turn-on-a-dime handling, and was crushed when he found out we weren't keeping it. He particularly liked the moon-roof. "It's the coolest," he said