

Bird Field Note
Owl Banding, Shrubby Draws,
Songbird Banding, Raptor Surveys
Kate Stone
9/26/14



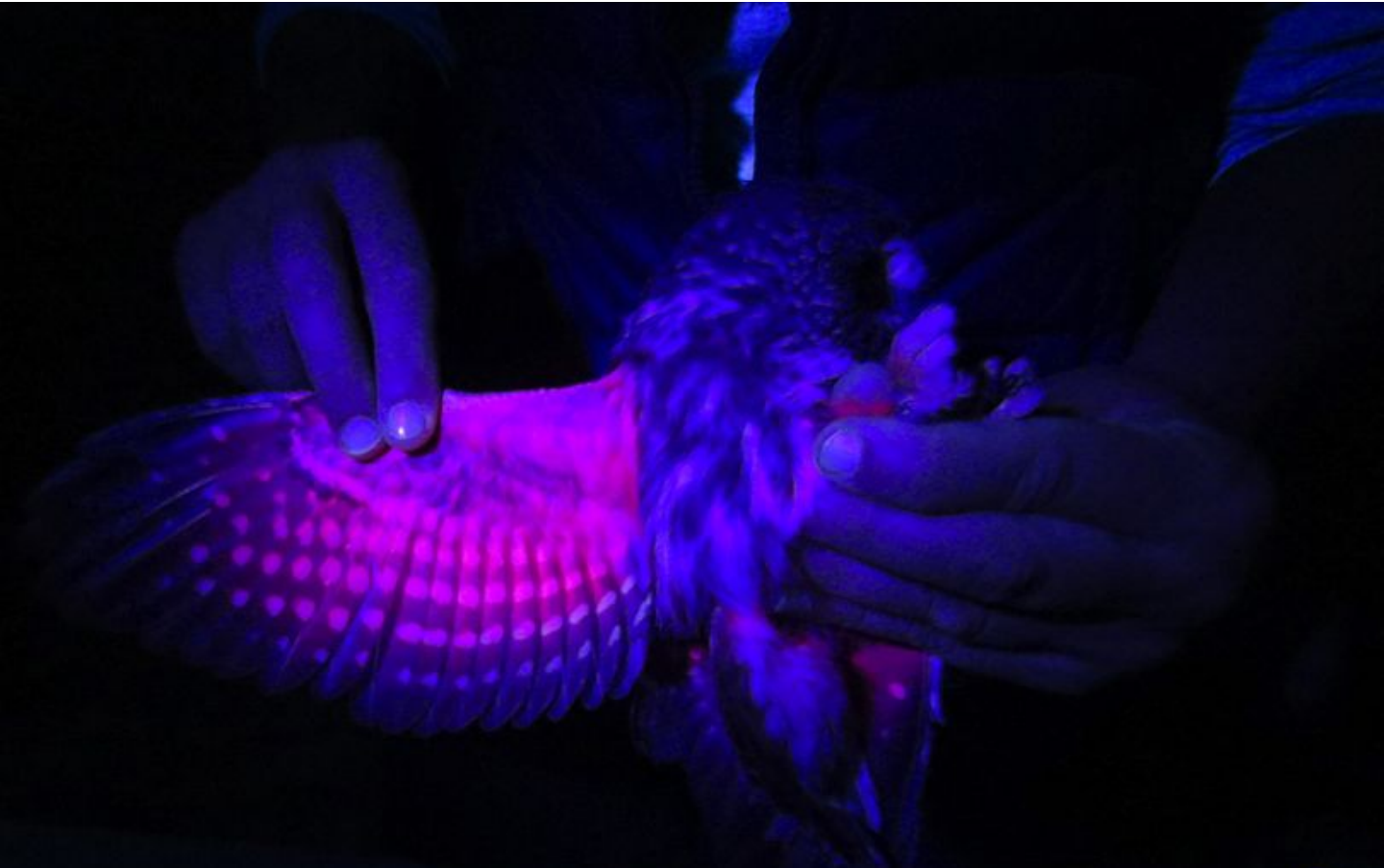
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Northern Saw-whet Owl Tracking

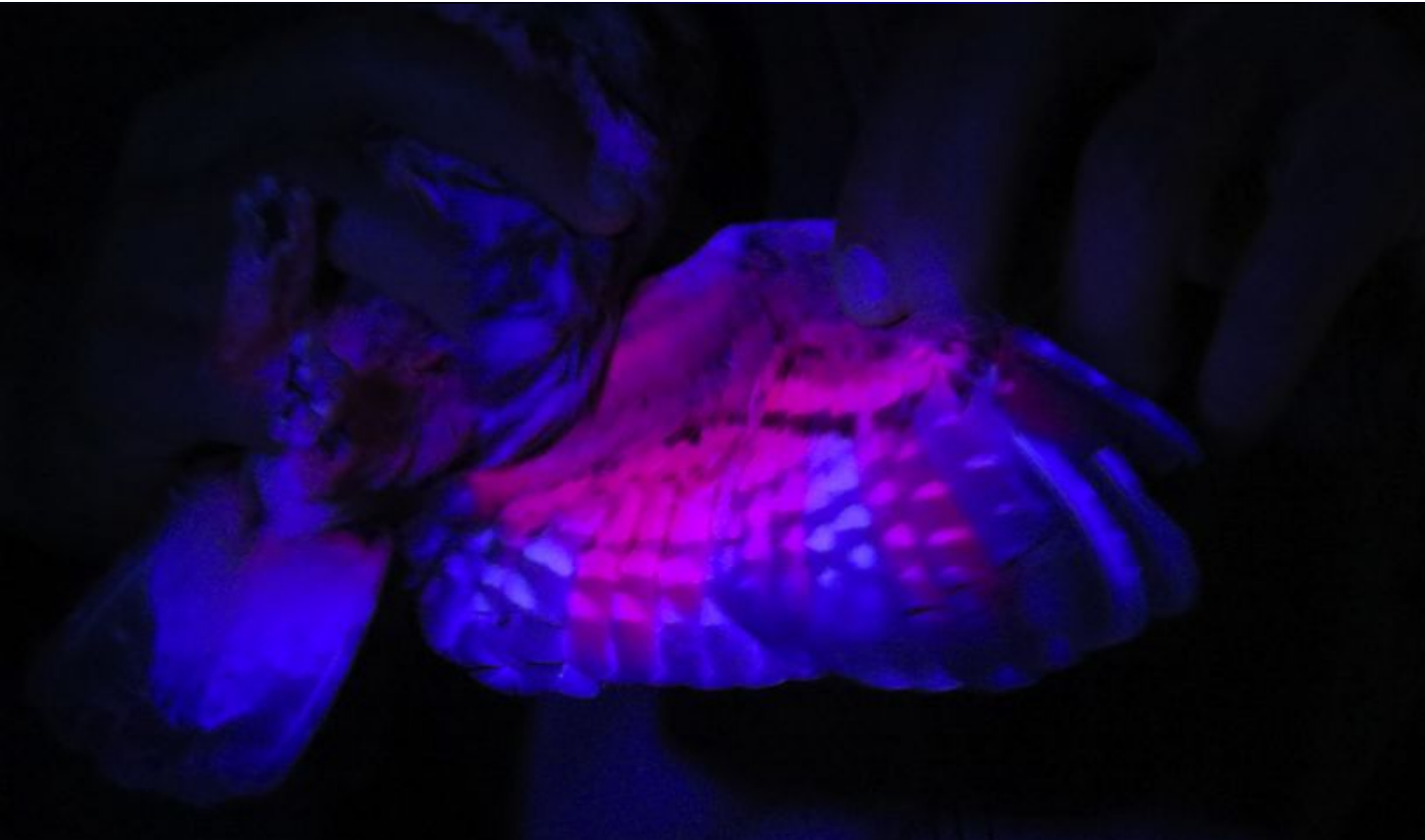
This week we began trapping Northern Saw-whet Owls. Our hope is to catch migrants, attach temporary radio transmitters to them, and then track them as they migrate south through the valley. In four nights of trapping we caught 18 owls and deployed transmitters on 16.



We use a UV light to help age the owls based on their molt patterns. Owls born this year show a uniform pink reflection under UV light.



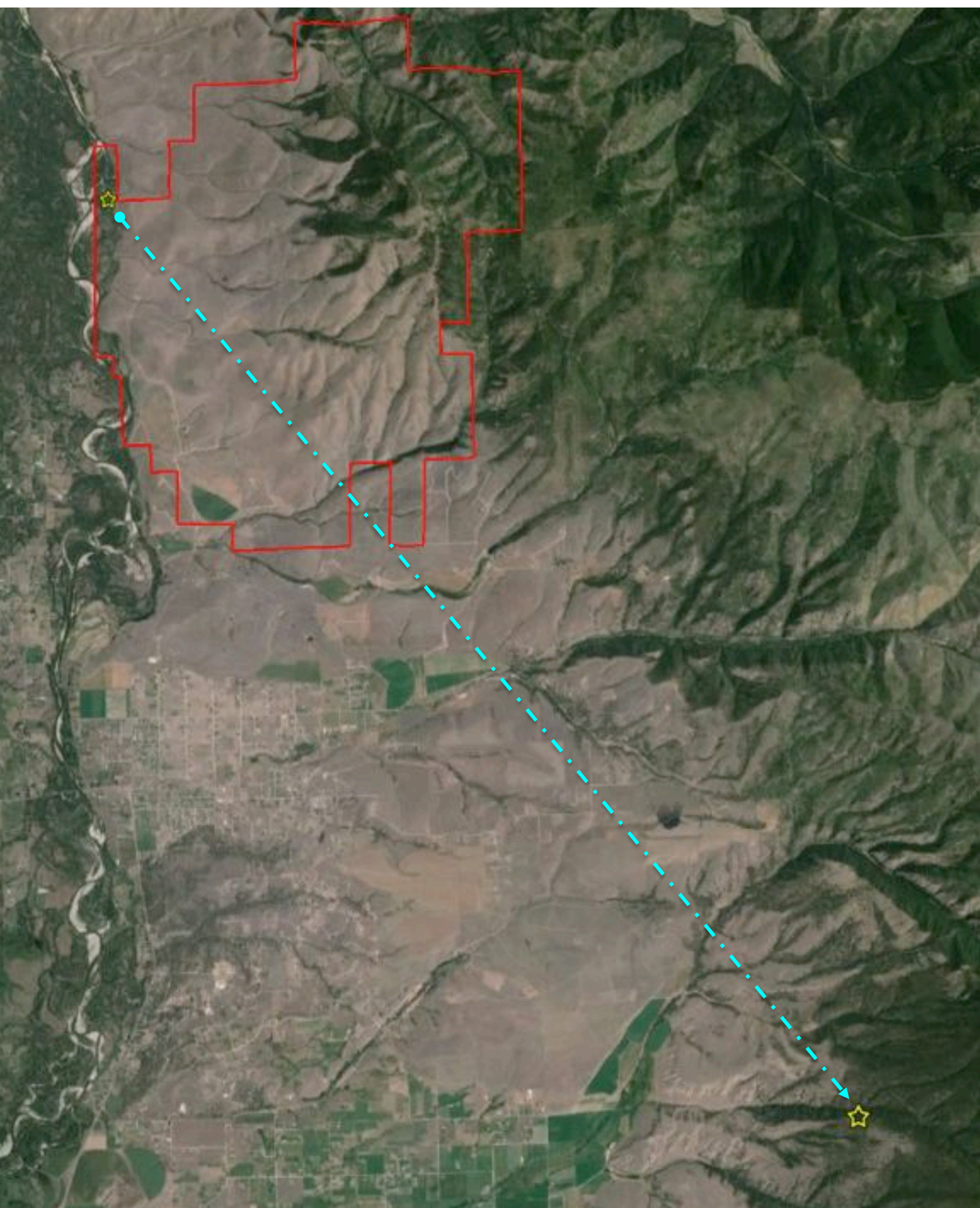
Older birds show distinct blocks of new (pink) and old (white) feathers.



This adult owl had an old eye injury and an apparent talon wound on its back. We banded it and released it without a transmitter.



Though we expected the owls to travel down the Bitterroot River corridor, several of them have moved along the base of the Sapphire Mountains. This owl travelled a minimum of 11 miles in one night, ending up in the Threemile Wildlife Management Area.



When possible, we track the owls on the ground to determine roosting habitat and substrate. Without a telemetry unit, we would not have seen this owl roosting just 2 inches off of the ground.



Over four days, this owl moved from the floodplain, up to one of the northern draws, then up to the slopes of Little Baldy, and then back down.



Shrubby Draw Surveys- September 18th

Yellow-rumped Warblers continued to dominate shrubby draw surveys. We also detected many more Savannah Sparrows than we had in previous surveys.

Species detected in shrubby draw surveys September 18th, 2014				
	Partridge Alley	Sheep Camp	Tongue Creek	Total
Yellow-rumped Warbler	12	38	28	78
European Starling	31			31
Savannah Sparrow	22	4	1	27
Western Meadowlark	27			27
Chipping Sparrow	10	8		18
Cedar Waxwing		17		17
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	2	14	1	17
Unknown Sparrow	1	12	4	17
White-crowned Sparrow	5	9		14
American Goldfinch		1	12	13
Spotted Towhee		10	1	11
Gray Partridge		1	8	9
House Wren		6	3	9
American Pipit	6	1		7
Vesper Sparrow	3	3	1	7
Black-billed Magpie	3		2	5
Clark's Nutcracker		5		5
Dark-eyed Junco	1	4		5
Rock Wren	5			5
Unknown Bird		1	4	5
Red-breasted Nuthatch		4		4
Black-capped Chickadee		3		3
Mourning Dove	2		1	3
Northern Flicker		1	2	3
American Robin		2		2
Lincoln's Sparrow	1	1		2
Say's Phoebe	1		1	2
Song Sparrow	1		1	2
American Kestrel		1		1
Cooper's Hawk	1			1
Golden-crowned Kinglet		1		1
Great Horned Owl	1			1
Gray Catbird			1	1
Orange-crowned Warbler		1		1
Red Crossbill		1		1
Ruffed Grouse	1			1
Unknown Flycatcher		1		1
Total	136	150	71	357
Species Richness	19	23	14	34

A flock of Savannah Sparrows gathered in a woody debris pile in Partridge Alley.



A Song Sparrow (left) and a Rock Wren (right) fought over the same perches in the Partridge Alley dump.



Avian Science Center: Fall Migration Highlights 9/15-9/19/14

We caught 431 birds this week, our busiest of the season so far. Our highest single-day total occurred on Monday, September 15th, when we caught 118 birds across all three sites. We also had our biggest day at any one site, capturing 50 birds at the Sheep Camp station on Wednesday, September 17th. Sheep Camp was the busiest site overall, with 193 captures over five days. We captured the fewest birds at the Ridge site. Our captures included a wide diversity of birds, from tiny kinglets and Common Yellowthroats to Sharp-shinned Hawks and an American Kestrel. Our top species included Ruby-crowned Kinglets (61) and Yellow-rumped Warblers (50).



Golden-crowned Kinglet



The nets are designed to capture small- to medium-sized songbirds, but occasionally they trap small raptors. We caught this male American Kestrel in Sheep Camp on September 17th.



Young American Robins' pale plumage distinguishes them from their adult counterparts.



We rarely catch Brown Creepers. They tend to stay close to tree trunks, where their plumage provides camouflage as they forage for small insects, spiders, and larvae. Brown Creepers build a hammock-shaped nest, often behind a loosened flap of bark on a dead or dying tree. They glue their nest together with sticky insect cocoons and spider egg cases.



Raptor Migration Update

Raptor Counts: 9/16/2014-9/22/2014



Despite the unseasonably warm and sunny conditions, we have recorded over 1,200 migrants so far this season. Previous season totals by this date average only 500 birds. In the past week alone we had three >100-bird days (Sept. 9, 12, and 15). We continue to see high numbers of Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels. We expect kestrel numbers to decrease by the end of the month. Winter weather moves in next week, which may push raptors south.

Weekly (9/16-9/22) and Seasonal Raptor Totals			
		Weekly Total	Season Total
Eagles	Golden Eagle	0	3
	Bald Eagle	1	6
	Unknown Eagle	0	0
Accipiters	Sharp-shinned Hawk	39	107
	Cooper's Hawk	43	129
	Northern Goshawk	7	14
	Unknown Accipiter	16	43
Buteos	Red-tailed Hawk	85	167
	Rough-legged Hawk	1	1
	Swainson's Hawk	9	18
	Broad-winged Hawk	7	21
	Ferruginous Hawk	1	4
	Unknown Buteo	3	12
Falcons	American Kestrel	84	221
	Merlin	6	12
	Peregrine Falcon	3	6
	Prairie Falcon	4	8
	Unknown Falcon	3	5
Other	Northern Harrier	17	41
	Osprey	16	37
	Turkey Vulture	226	356
	Unknown Hawk	7	17
	TOTAL	578	1228

The rounded tail and head projection of this juvenile Cooper's Hawk distinguish it from the similar Sharp-shinned Hawk.



A Broad-winged Hawk (left) and an American Kestrel (right) circled above the count site.



Raptor Trapping: 9/16-9/22/2014

This week we captured 11 raptors. Our lower trapping site on Indian Ridge received more attention from passing migrants than our site on West Baldy Ridge. The warm, sunny weather of the past few weeks provided birds with plenty of thermal lift, allowing them to cover great distances with little energy expenditure. As a result, the vast majority of migrants pass by our stations at high altitudes, making it difficult to lure them into our traps. Despite these unfavorable conditions, we have trapped 32 birds to date. We look forward to this weekend, when cloudy skies should lower the altitude of passing birds and increase our ability to trap them.

Trapping summary for (9/16-9/22)

		Weekly Total		Season Total	
		Indian Ridge	West Baldy	Indian Ridge	West Baldy
Accipiters	Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	1	4	7
	Cooper's Hawk	0	1	0	7
Buteos	Red-tailed Hawk	1	0	2	1
Falcons	American Kestrel	4	0	9	0
	Merlin	0	0	1	0
Other	Northern Harrier	1	0	1	0
	<i>TOTAL</i>	9	2	17	15

Smoke from wildfires in Idaho created a thick haze in the Bitterroot Valley above our Indian Ridge trapping station.



Northern Harriers' long tails and white rump patch distinguish them from other raptor species.

