

Cedar Waxwings returned in large numbers. They are one of our later bird species to initiate breeding. Fledging often coincides with maturing berry crops.





Several cow elk and calves made use of the dense shrubs on the northern floodplain.

Many people have commented on the large numbers of roving Sandhill Cranes in the Bitterroot Valley this year. On any given day, I saw two to ten cranes foraging in the lowland grasslands on the ranch.



I was surprised to find a pair of Eastern Kingbirds settling into a nest used last year. Most passerines do not re-use nests from previous years. This nest survived the winter intact.



A Common Goldeneye ventured out into the main river channel with four babies.



Songbird Banding

On 5/29 we hosted our annual field trip with Craig Kuchel's class from Florence-Carlton High School. Local Forest Service Biologist Dave Lockman gave a demonstration in songbird banding.



A male Common Yellowthroat was one of the most striking birds we captured. Yellowthroat numbers have increased on the floodplain since 2010.



We captured a female Black-headed Grosbeak with signs of a brood patch. At least three males sang in the area, one from the tree right over the banding station. We also caught a Gray Catbird, two Yellow Warblers, and a Downy Woodpecker.



Lewis's Woodpeckers

We captured two Lewis's Woodpeckers and outfitted them with Pinpoint GPS units. We later located both of them at nearby nests, allowing us to monitor their tolerance of the units.

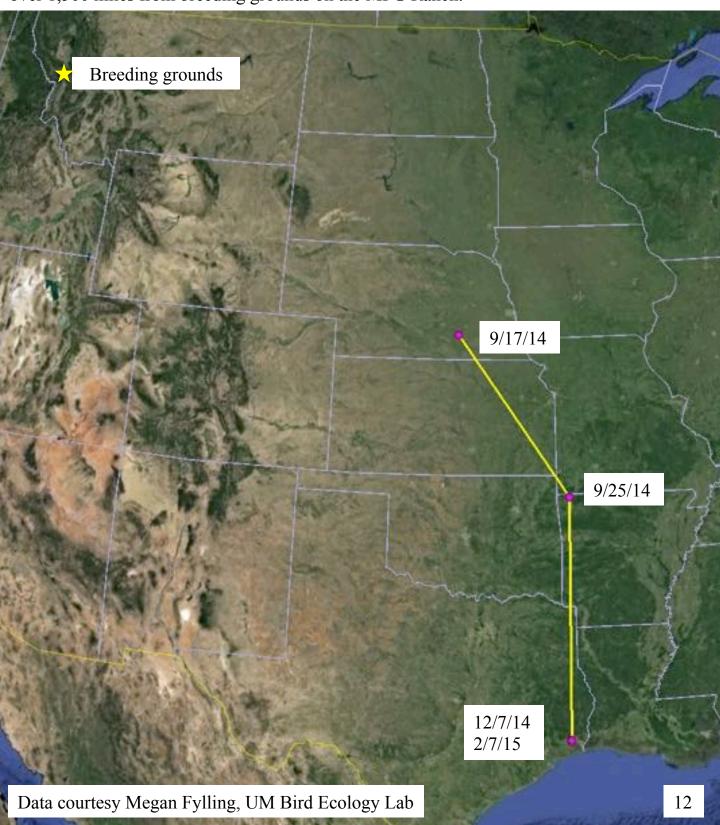


Similar to last year, we put color bands on both birds. So far our re-sightings of birds marked last year suggest that Lewis's Woodpeckers do not show fidelity to nest sites or mates, contrary to previous hypotheses. They do return to the same general area.



Gray Catbirds

MPG Ranch sponsors two research projects related to Gray Catbirds: nestling survival and dispersal, and determination of migration and overwintering locations. The catbird crew retrieved one pinpoint GPS unit this past week. The four GPS locations documented an easterly migration route during fall 2014, and overwintering near the Texas-Louisiana border, over 1,500 miles from breeding grounds on the MPG Ranch.

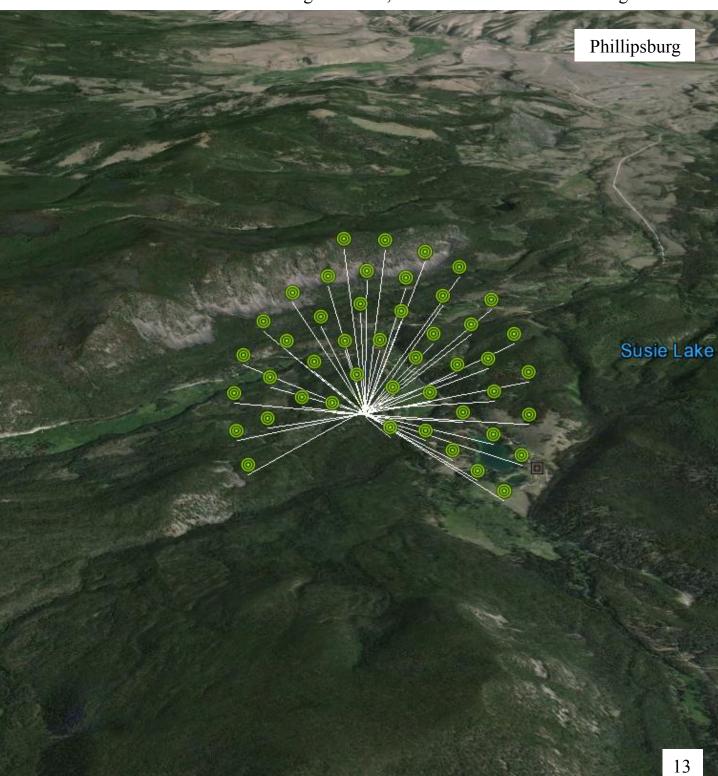


Raptor View Research Institute Research Update



Osprey

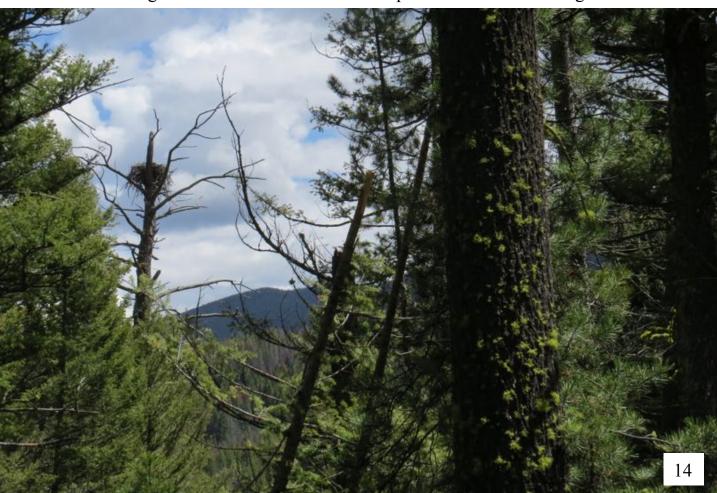
On May 21, Rapunzel the Osprey traveled to an area near Moose Lake, ~20 miles southwest of Philipsburg, MT. Her transmitter suddenly stopped moving, which usually indicates the bird died or shed the transmitter. Fearing the worst, we raced to the area to investigate.



We walked along the Middle Fork of Rock Creek towards the transmitter's location. The area was dense with lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir.



As we approached our destination, we saw a large stick nest. Our GPS unit placed Rapunzel's last transmission right underneath. The dense forest prevented us from seeing inside the nest.





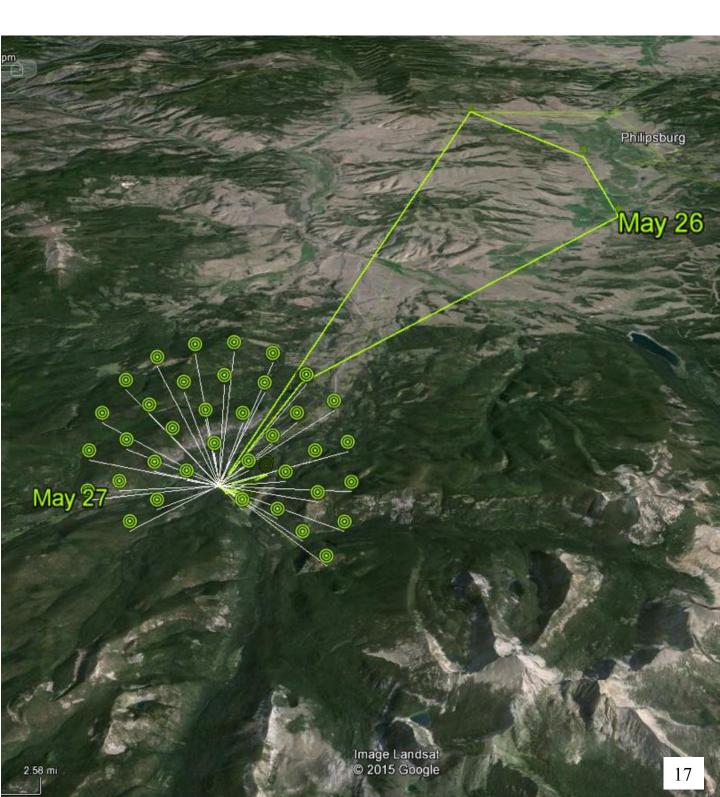
As we watched, a male Osprey flew in with a fish. While he ate, we heard a second Osprey vocalize from the nest.



Unfortunately, we were unable to see the Osprey in the nest during our visit. We searched the ground beneath the nest and did not find Rapunzel's transmitter. However, we did find the wing of an Osprey about 150 yards from the nest. The flesh on the wing was still fresh, indicating the bird had died recently. Was this sign that Rapunzel died? Or did we find the remains of a different female who Rapunzel replaced?



We received the next locations from Rapunzel's transmitter on May 27. We were relieved to see she made a five-hour trip towards Philipsburg on May 26. Other than this one movement, almost all of her GPS fixes came from the nesting tree. It appears she was on top of the nest during our visit, and was the bird we heard vocalize while the male ate. This dense concentration of locations strongly indicates incubation. Though she is over a month behind most Osprey in the area, Rapunzel may raise a clutch of young this season. If so, Rapunzel would be the first North American Osprey tracked from birth to breeding via GPS telemetry.



Red-tailed Hawks

The eggs in all three of the Red-tailed Hawk nests hatched. The young in this nest in Lower Woodchuck are approximately 15-20 days old.



American Kestrels

AK-62, the female American Kestrel we outfitted with a Pinpoint GPS transmitter two weeks ago, appears to be handling the unit well. This week we deployed a second transmitter on a female American Kestrel using a nestbox in Sheep Camp.

