

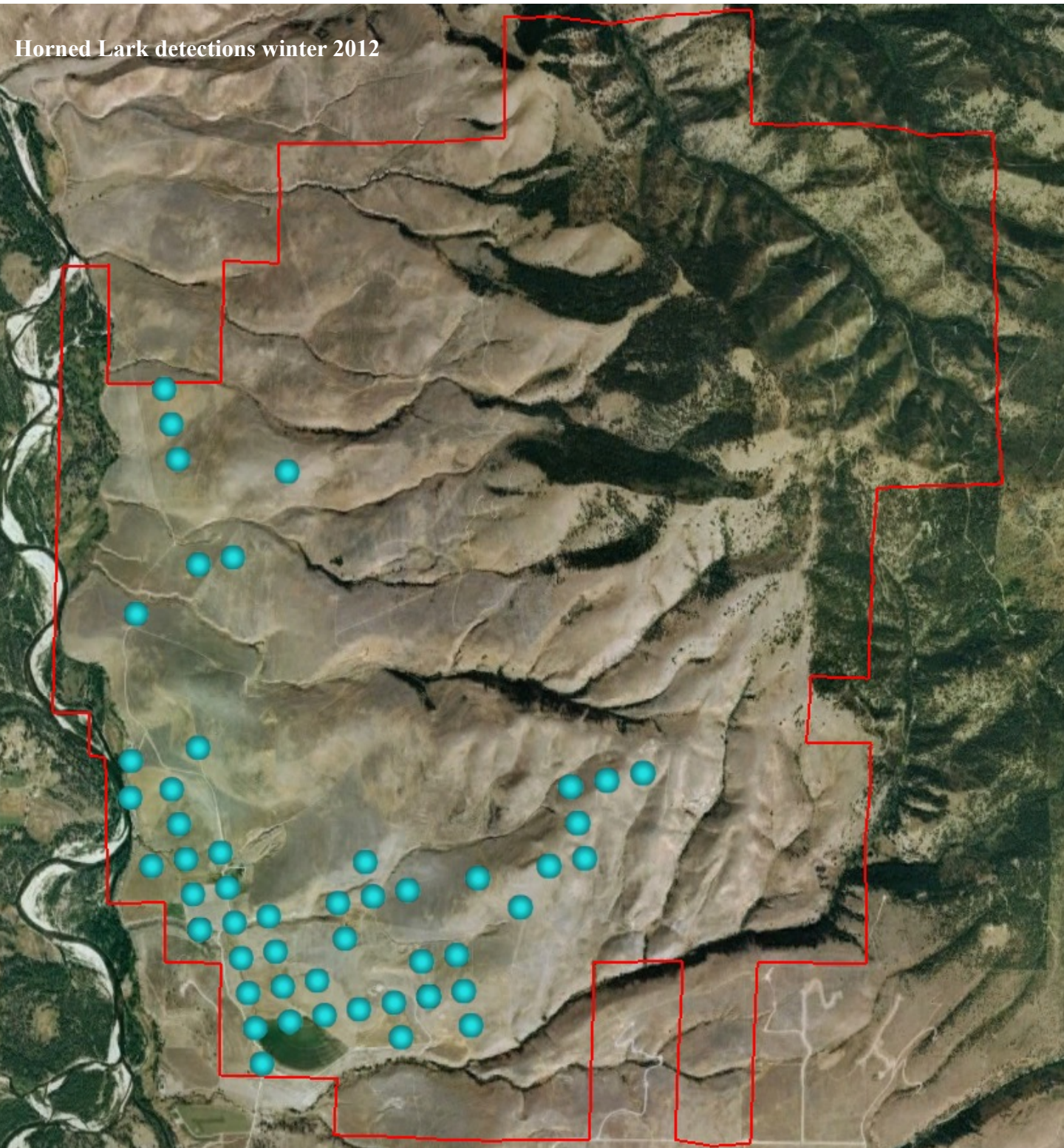
Winter point count summary
Kate Stone 4/24/12

We completed our second year of winter point counts, surveying 534 points on the property from January 23 to March 19. We observed a total of 7,599 birds of 62 species (Table 1).

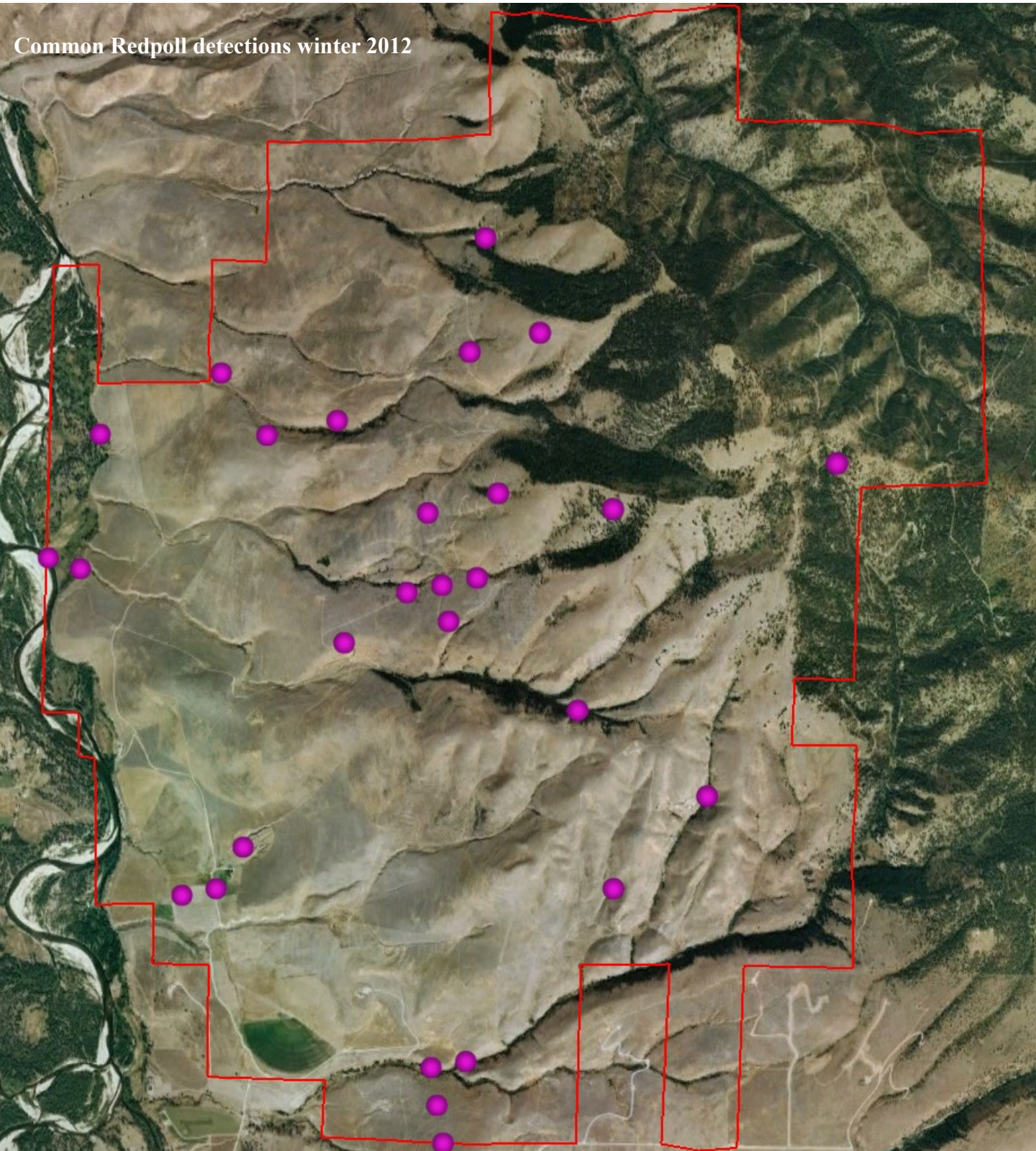
Table 1. Species detections for 2012 winter point counts on the MPG Ranch

Horned Lark	2,195	Rough-legged Hawk	21
Canada Goose	1,392	House Sparrow	20
Common Redpoll	1,297	Gray Jay	16
Black-billed Magpie	288	Brown Creeper	11
Red-breasted Nuthatch	263	Common Merganser	10
Black-capped Chickadee	236	Belted Kingfisher	10
Common Raven	188	Snow Bunting	9
Red Crossbill	184	Pileated Woodpecker	8
Mallard	134	Downy Woodpecker	7
Mountain Chickadee	112	Red-winged Blackbird	7
Pine Grosbeak	111	Long-eared Owl	6
Dark-eyed Junco	100	Northern Shrike	6
Clark's Nutcracker	89	Western Bluebird	5
Golden Eagle	79	Solitary Sandpiper	5
Bohemian waxwing	75	Steller's Jay	5
Gray Partridge	72	Song Sparrow	5
American Tree Sparrow	67	Ruffed Grouse	4
American Robin	64	Mourning Dove	4
Northern Harrier	62	Hairy Woodpecker	4
Bald Eagle	51	Common Goldeneye	4
Northern Flicker	49	American Goldfinch	3
Golden-crowned Kinglet	43	Prairie Falcon	3
Snow Goose	37	Great Blue Heron	2
Pine Siskin	34	Townsend's Solitaire	2
Red-tailed Hawk	31	Lapland Longspur	2
Western Meadowlark	29	Killdeer	2
Mountain Bluebird	28	American Kestrel	1
European Starling	28	Merlin	1
Dusky Grouse	27	Northern Goshawk	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	25	Winter Wren	1
Pygmy Nuthatch	23	Northern Pygmy-Owl	1

Our most observed bird in 2012 was the Horned Lark that breeds and overwinters in the Bitterroot Valley. We often noted large flocks of Horned Larks in the agricultural areas near the ranch entrance. We also observed them in open grasslands at middle elevations. The flocks we saw on our winter counts may be migrants from the north, but our breeding population may head farther south for the winter.



Our third most common bird was the Common Redpoll, with 1,297 observations. We did not observe this species in 2011, so we were surprised to see it frequently in 2012. We detected Common Redpolls in bitterbrush, conifer woodlands, conifer forest, shrubby draws, conifer draws, *Populus* draws, and river bottom forest. While performing surveys, we often identified this bird flying overhead. Redpoll populations are known to be irruptive, or annually variable. Birders throughout Montana reported them in high numbers this year.





Other unusual detections for winter 2012 include 72 Gray Partridges, 11 Brown Creepers, 6 Long-eared Owls, and 5 Solitary Sandpipers.

We noticed differences in the most commonly observed birds between 2011 and 2012. Canada Geese, Horned Larks, and Black-billed Magpies were common both years (Table 2). Differences between years may be attributed to the irruptive nature of some bird populations and the unpredictable detection of large bird flocks that range over a large area in the winter, like the Snow Bunting.

Total counts for 2012 were quite a bit lower than the 11,458 birds observed in 2011. However, a single flock of 5,000 Canada Geese in 2011 comprised the bulk of the difference. We detected 64 species in 2011 and 62 in 2012. Table 3 presents a full list of species detected in 2011.

Table 2. Top 5 species detected in winter point counts in 2011 and 2012

2012 (7,599 observations)		2011 (11,458 observations)	
Horned lark	2,195	Canada goose	7,909
Canada goose	1,392	Horned lark	655
Common redpoll	1,297	Snow bunting	451
Black-billed magpie	288	Black-billed magpie	298
Red-breasted nuthatch	263	Clark’s nutcracker	263

Table 3. Species detections for 2011 winter point counts on the MPG Ranch

Canada Goose	7,909	Bohemian waxwing	13
Horned Lark	655	Cedar Waxwing	12
Snow Bunting	451	Northern Flicker	11
Black-billed Magpie	298	Hairy Woodpecker	10
Clark's Nutcracker	263	Western Meadowlark	10
Mallard	219	House Sparrow	10
Common Raven	184	Townsend's Solitaire	9
Black-capped Chickadee	147	Northern Shrike	9
Red-breasted Nuthatch	138	Pileated Woodpecker	9
Mountain Chickadee	129	Downy Woodpecker	9
Red Crossbill	114	Northern Goshawk	6
Mountain Bluebird	106	American Goldfinch	5
Golden Eagle	89	Golden-crowned Kinglet	4
Pine Grosbeak	69	Northern PygmyOwl	4
European Starling	69	American Kestrel	4
Common Goldeneye	58	Belted Kingfisher	3
Gray Partridge	46	Ruffed Grouse	3
American Tree Sparrow	43	Rock Dove	3
Pygmy Nuthatch	42	Song Sparrow	3
American Robin	37	Cooper's Hawk	2
Dark-eyed Junco	27	Great Blue Heron	2
Rough-legged Hawk	26	Wilson's Snipe	2
Gray Jay	22	Northern Harrier	2
Snow Goose	22	American Pipit	1
Red-tailed Hawk	22	Clark's Grebe	1
Bald Eagle	21	American Crow	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	20	Killdeer	1
Steller's Jay	19	Mourning Dove	1
Brown Creeper	15	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1
Lapland Longspur	15	Prairie Falcon	1
Gray-crowned Rosy Finch	15	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1