MPG Ranch Research Update- 11/11/2011
Kate Stone

Raptor Migration

We extended raptor surveys into this week because of the high raptor numbers on some days in the last week of October. Observations also continued at the Bridger Mountains site, but counting ceased at Nora Ridge and Jewel Basin.

Adam and William counted through some harsh weather, and despite one day with decent raptor numbers, they confirmed that migration is winding down. Surprisingly, one of the last birds of the season was a sharp-shinned hawk. We observed high numbers of this species early in the season, but it we infrequently observed it in the past few weeks.

The Harlan's hawk is a subspecies of the red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) and its plumage is quite different from our typical red-tails. Harlan's hawks breed in Alaska and northwestern Canada. We observed more Harlan's hawks towards the end of the season. Photo by Ashley Jensen.

Ashley and Beth observed this rough-legged hawk actually hit the owl decoy.
Photo by Ashley Jensen.

Raptor totals for the week of 10/28-11/2/11

Species	Count
Red-tailed Hawk	17
Northern Harrier	12
Unknown Buteo	9
Rough-legged Hawk	6
Bald Eagle	4
Unknown Eagle	3
Golden Eagle	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2
Unknown Hawk	1
Cooper's Hawk	1
Total	**58**

Raptor type	Count
Buteo	32
Northern Harrier	12
Eagle	10
Accipiter	3
Unknown	1
Total	**58**

Female rough-legged hawk. Photo by Ashley Jensen.

Raptor totals for the 2011 season

Species	Count
Red-tailed Hawk	776
Sharp-shinned Hawk	383
American Kestrel	225
Cooper's Hawk	167
Northern Harrier	136
Golden Eagle	84
Bald Eagle	58
Rough-legged Hawk	58
Turkey Vulture	50
Unknown Buteo	46
Osprey	45
Unknown Accipiter	44
Unknown Hawk	27
Northern Goshawk	10
Prairie Falcon	9
Swainson's Hawk	9
Merlin	6
Broad-winged Hawk	6
Ferruginous Hawk	5
Unknown Eagle	5
Peregrine Falcon	4
Unknown Falcon	2
Total	**2155**

Raptor type	Count
Buteo	900
Accipiter	604
Falcon	246
Eagle	147
Northern Harrier	136
Turkey Vulture	50
Osprey	45
Unknown	27
Total	**2155**

Ashley identified this as a three-year-old bald eagle. Photo by Ashley Jensen.

Owl migration and telemetry

The owl crew also finished up the 2011 trapping season, pulling in over 500 northern saw-whet owl captures. I am wrapping up the owl telemetry project. On Tuesday I confirmed that three of the signals I was hearing were no longer attached to an owl. I was able to retrieve all three of the transmitters.

A transmitter under a log on the northern floodplain.

Two of the retrieved transmitters.

We only have one owl left with a radio transmitter. This hatch-year owl was banded early in the morning on 11/2/2001. We released it with a radio transmitter at 1:22 am. It travelled 0.2 miles the morning of release, to a clump of ponderosa pines just south of the owl trailer on the northern floodplain. The next night, it moved approximately 3 miles south to the cottonwood-dominated island just west of the Schroeder's house. It stayed in this general area until the night of 11/7 and 11/8, when it moved approximately 0.8 miles north to a clump of shrubs near the pump slough. I detected its signal from the same general location for so long that I thought another transmitter had been pulled off. On 11/9, I was happy to pick up its signal in a new location from the plane, and then find the actual owl when I did some searching on the ground. I was not able to find the owl on 11/11, despite searching in both of its previous known locations.

Northern saw-whet owl #1014-062391

Yes, there is an owl in this picture. Without the radio signal and intense scolding from a flock of chickadees, I would have had a difficult time knowing there was an owl in this clump of shrubs next to the pump slough.