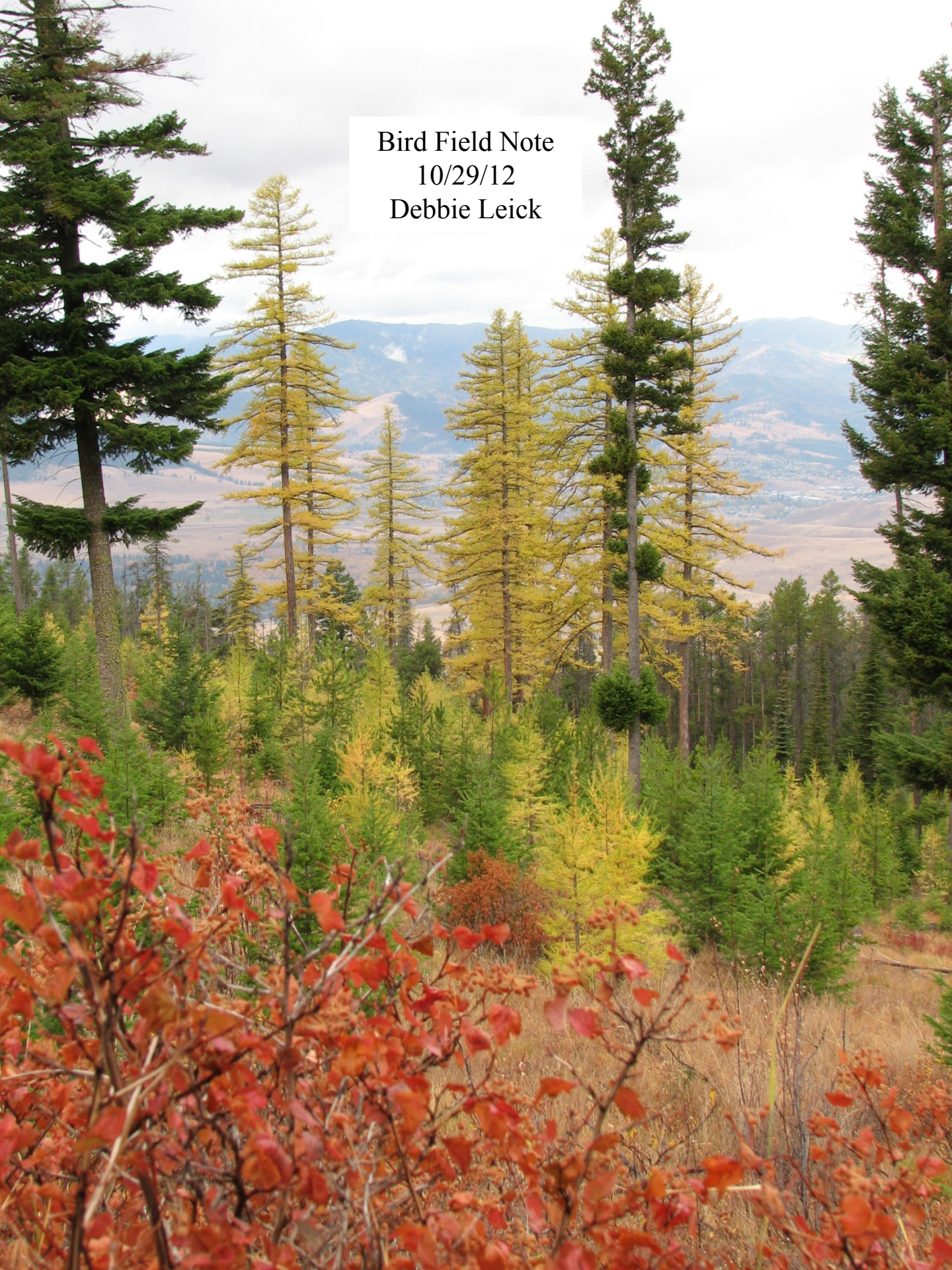
Bird Field Note
10/29/12
Debbie Leick

October delivers a change of seasons and weather patterns. Colorful fall foliage brightens the ranch, and welcome precipitation arrives.

A wild horse herd of six adults and three foals enjoy the ranch's forage. Northern shrikes cache prey on barbed wire or thorns. A spiny hawthorn (below) supplies the perfect larder.

A long-eared owl flushes from its thick, shrubby day roost. Big, feathery legs dangle as it flies.

Resilient bitterbrush (above) sprouts new growth from superficially blackened branches. Once a vibrant yellow, dry rabbitbrush flowers (below) now resemble old cauliflower.

A stinkbug navigates the rabbitbrush.

A red-tailed hawk remains motionless as I approach. An open mouth and fluffed feathers indicate a stressed bird. When I return several hours later, the bird is gone.

A Townsend's solitaire exhibits its characteristic white eye ring and buffy wing patch. It belongs to the same thrush family as bluebirds and robins.

Hawk banders and counters entice migrating raptors with a plastic great-horned owl. A fearless predator, great-horned owls attack hawks, eagles, and other owls. Passing migrants spot the decoy and fly in for a closer view. Sometimes they swoop and hit it.

Smooth sumac leaves transform from green to brilliant red.

During a brief snow squall, a red-tailed hawk braves the weather. Dropping temperatures and decreased daylight signal winter's approach.