

Bird Field Note
compiled by Kate Stone
10/4/15



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Northern Saw-whet Owl Research Update

As of 10/4, we've captured 42 Northern Saw-whet Owls. We expect to finish trapping in the next week. Most of the owls we've captured are young of the year. In the past week, we saw a higher proportion of adults.



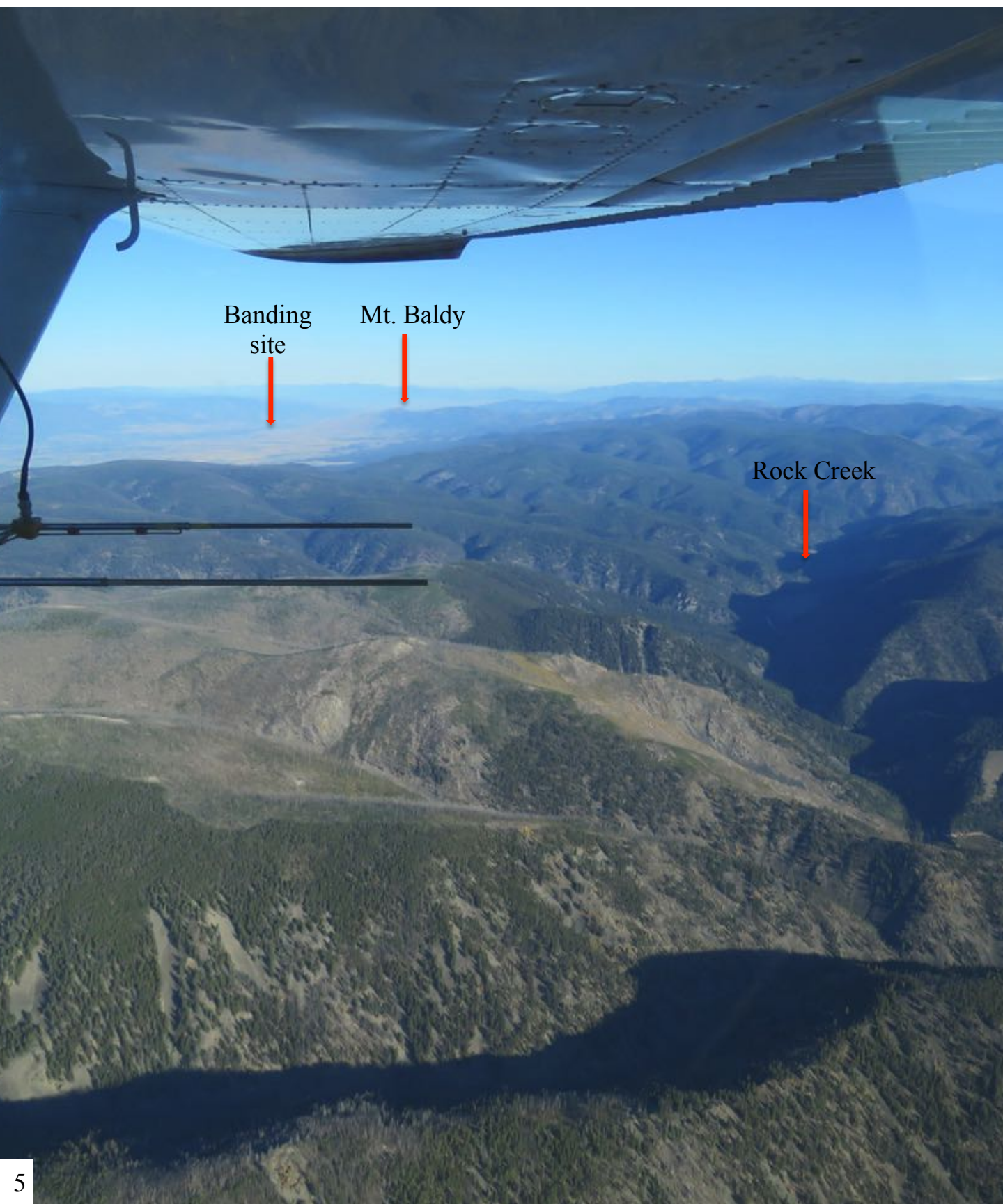
Though the waxing and full moon made for beautiful evenings, we caught few owls on moonlit nights.



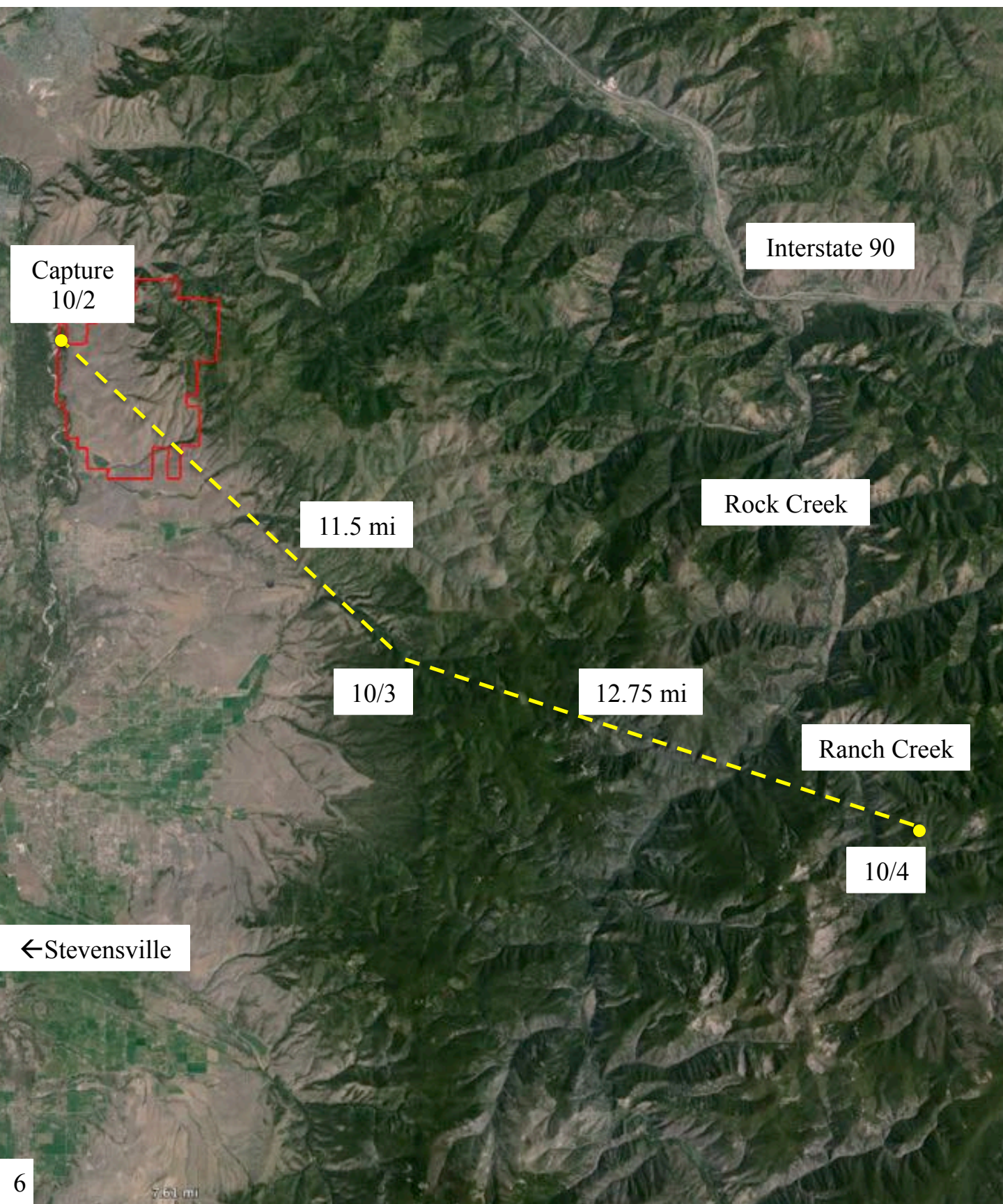
We often hear rustling in the grass and shrubs while owl trapping. William used the thermal camera to pinpoint the location of this night creature. In the dark, it took us several minutes to realize our visitor was a Northern Flying Squirrel, not an owl.



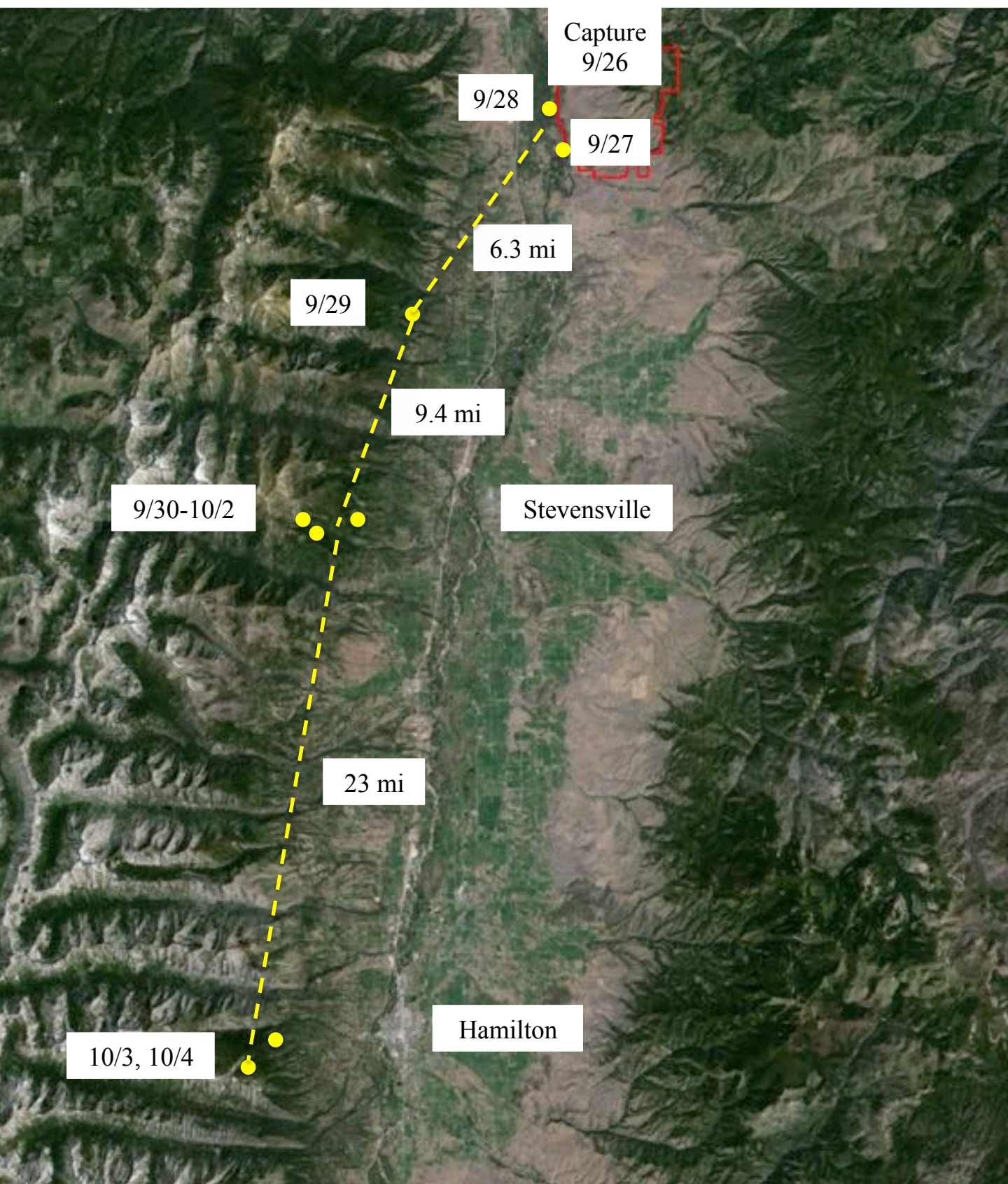
Compared to last year, we've seen more owls moving farther east and through higher elevations into the Sapphire Mountains. Few owls have used the Bitterroot Valley floor. The steep topography in the Sapphires limits detection range to as little as 0.25 miles; in the open conditions of the valley, we may detect a transmitter as far as five miles away.



One owl we followed into the Sapphires flew farther east than any owl we've tracked before. It flew 11.5 miles the night we captured it, stopped for one day at the Threemile Wildlife Management Area, and then headed east into steep hills above Ranch Creek, a tributary of Rock Creek.



A handful of owls have moved south along the west side of the valley. Several times, the owl shown below roosted at elevations > 6,000 ft. It also exhibited stopover behavior when it spent three days on the south slopes of St. Mary's Peak west of Stevensville. For the past two days, it's roosted on the slopes of Ward Mountain west of Hamilton.



As before, we observe a small fraction of the owls we've tracked to roost sites. Most of the time, we find them when they roost in shrubs and/or close to the ground.



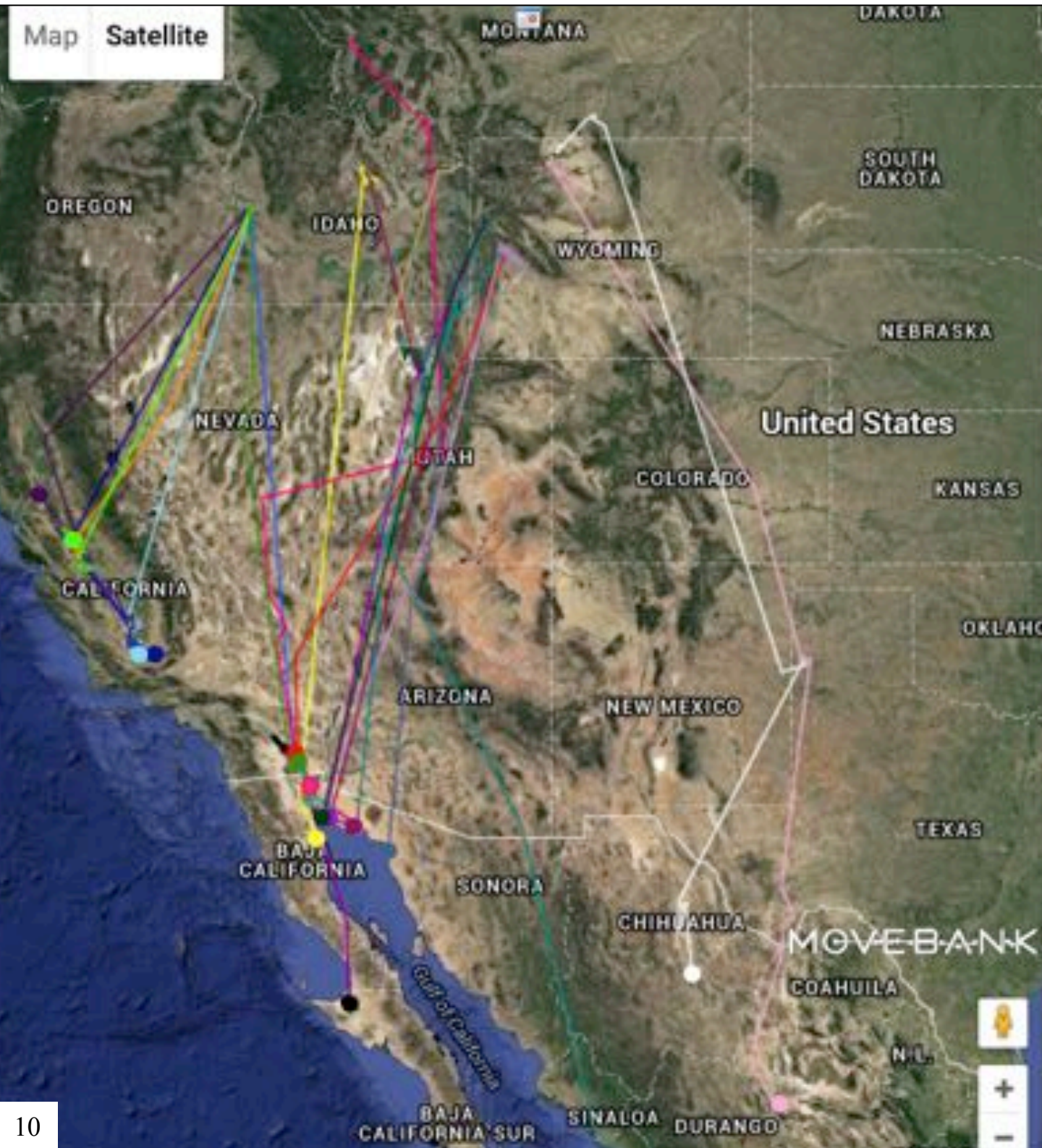
We found a porcupine resting about 10 feet above a roosting owl.



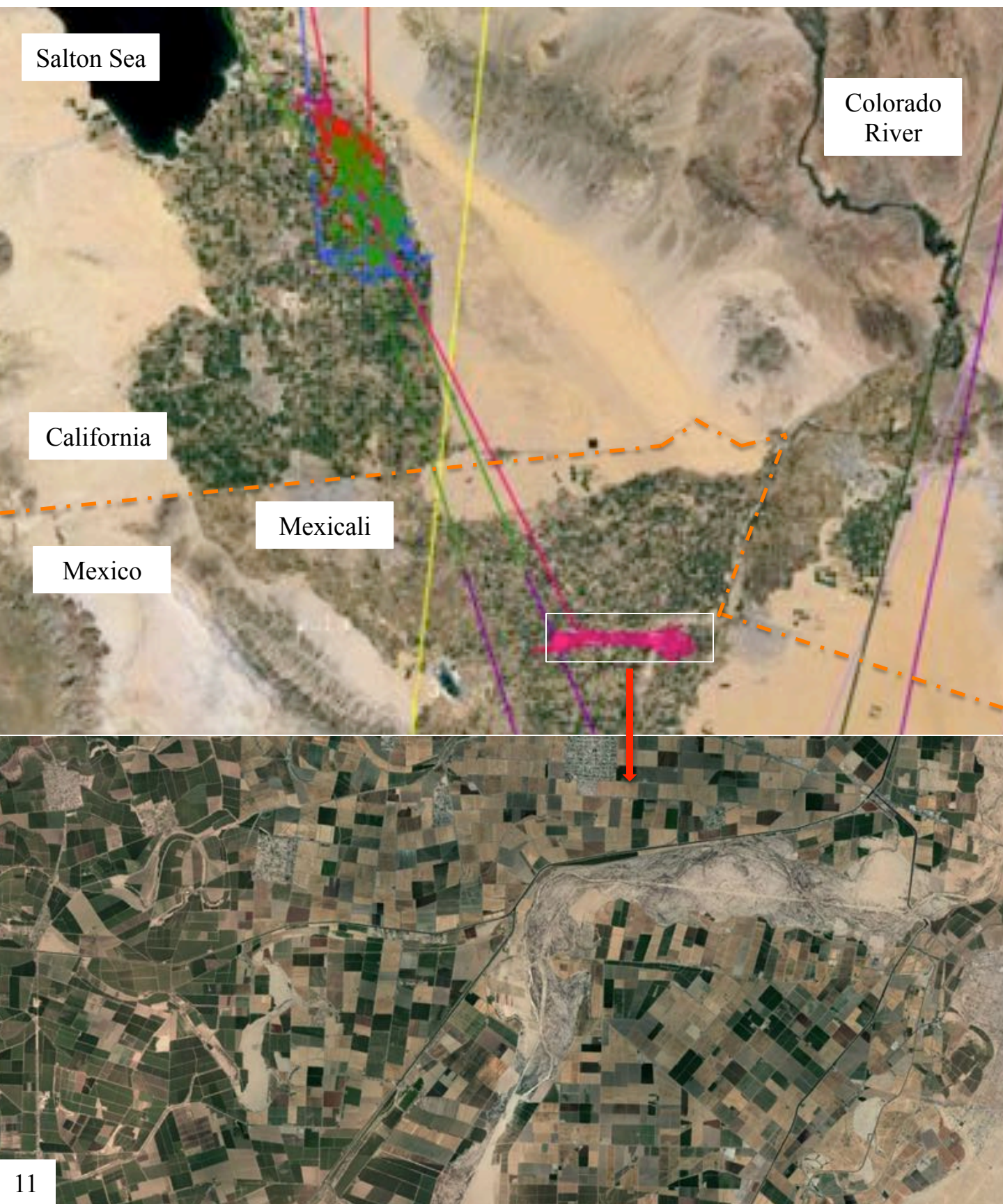
Long-billed Curlew Update

Maps courtesy Intermountain Bird Observatory

Thanks to the effort of the Intermountain Bird Observatory, we continue to learn more about the migratory paths and overwintering areas of Long-billed Curlews breeding in the Intermountain West. “Dave”, the female from the MPG Ranch (in dark pink), breeds farther north than the other curlews in the study.



Dave (dark pink) spent most of the past few months with curlews from Idaho (green and blue) and Wyoming (red) in agricultural fields southeast of the Salton Sea, near the Mexican border in California. As of 9/29, she had crossed the border and moved to agricultural fields southeast of Mexicali.



Raptor Migration Update

Raptor Counts: 9/23/2015-9/29/2015



We recorded 650 migrating raptors this week, bringing our season total to 2,474. Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks dominated this week's count, though Accipiters and American Kestrels also made sizeable contributions. The proportion of adult Accipiters increased. Because young Accipiters tend to move earlier than adults, this increase in adults may indicate that the Accipiter flight is tapering off.

Weekly (9/23-9/29) and Seasonal Raptor Totals			
		Weekly Total	Season Total
Eagles	Golden Eagle	15	22
	Bald Eagle	2	5
	Unknown Eagle	0	0
Accipiters	Sharp-shinned Hawk	79	252
	Cooper's Hawk	30	178
	Northern Goshawk	0	3
	Unknown Accipiter	9	26
Buteos	Red-tailed Hawk	132	414
	Rough-legged Hawk	1	1
	Swainson's Hawk	1	43
	Broad-winged Hawk	12	65
	Ferruginous Hawk	0	1
	Unknown Buteo	4	29
Falcons	American Kestrel	69	273
	Merlin	3	9
	Peregrine Falcon	2	29
	Prairie Falcon	3	16
	Unknown Falcon	3	11
Other	Northern Harrier	12	66
	Osprey	14	121
	Turkey Vulture	255	897
	Unknown Hawk	4	13
	Total	650	2,474

Raptor Trapping

We captured six raptors this week: four Sharp-shinned Hawks, one Prairie Falcon, and one Merlin. The Prairie Falcon was too small for a satellite transmitter.

Trapping summary for (9/23-9/29)

		Weekly Total		Season Total	
		Indian Ridge	West Baldy	Indian Ridge	West Baldy
Accipiters	Cooper's Hawk	0	0	3	6
	Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	0	7	0
Buteos	Red-tailed Hawk	0	0	5	2
	Swainson's Hawk	0	0	1	0
Falcons	Prairie Falcon	1	0	2	1
	Peregrine Falcon	0	0	4	0
	American Kestrel	0	0	1	2
	Merlin	1	0	1	0
Other	Northern Harrier	0	0	0	1
TOTAL		6	0	24	12

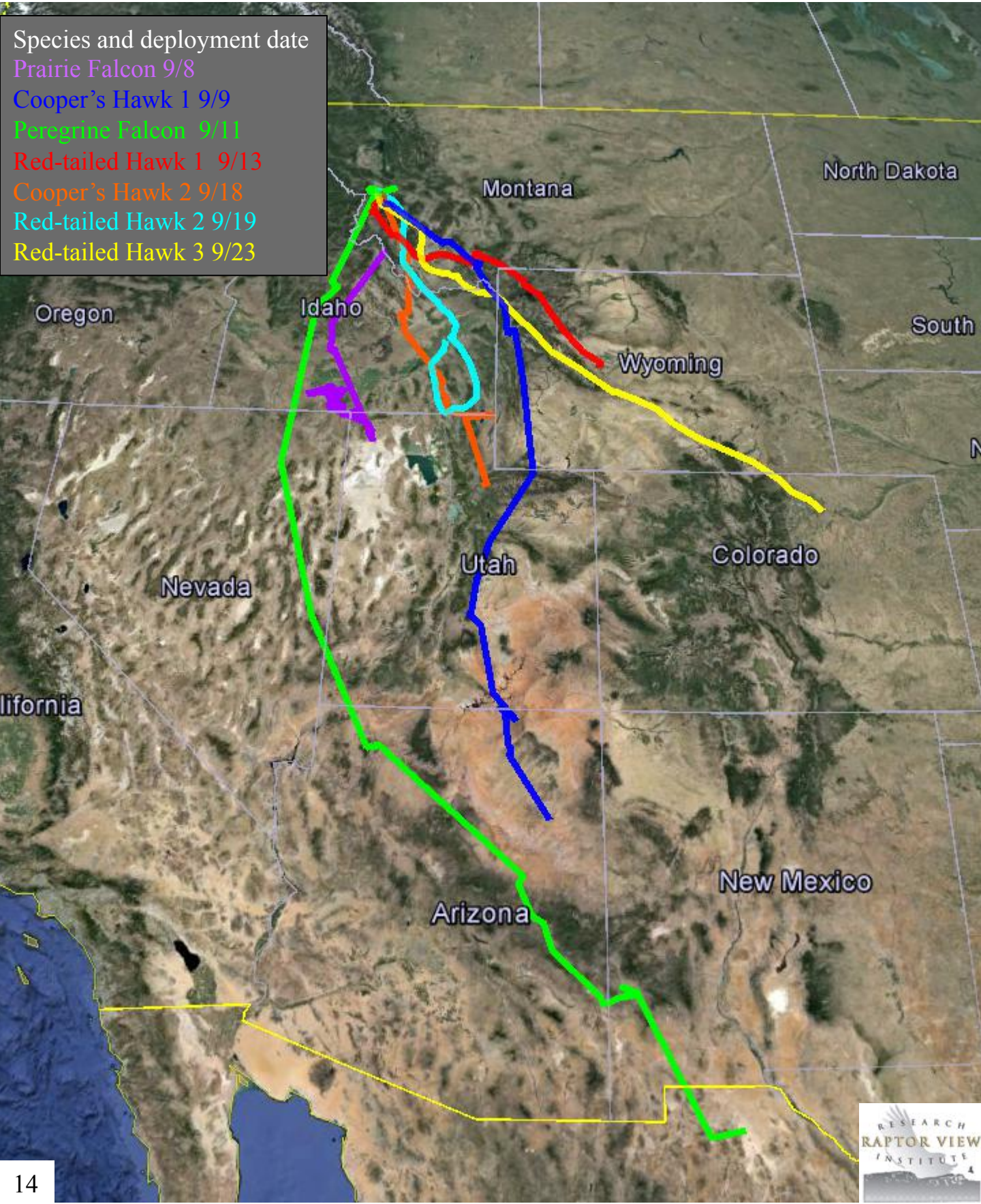
We captured two adult Sharp-shinned Hawks in a span of just ten minutes.



We've deployed seven satellite transmitters on raptors this fall. Six of the birds are still moving south. The Prairie Falcon, which has held tight to an area south of Twin Falls, ID since September 14, may be on its wintering grounds.

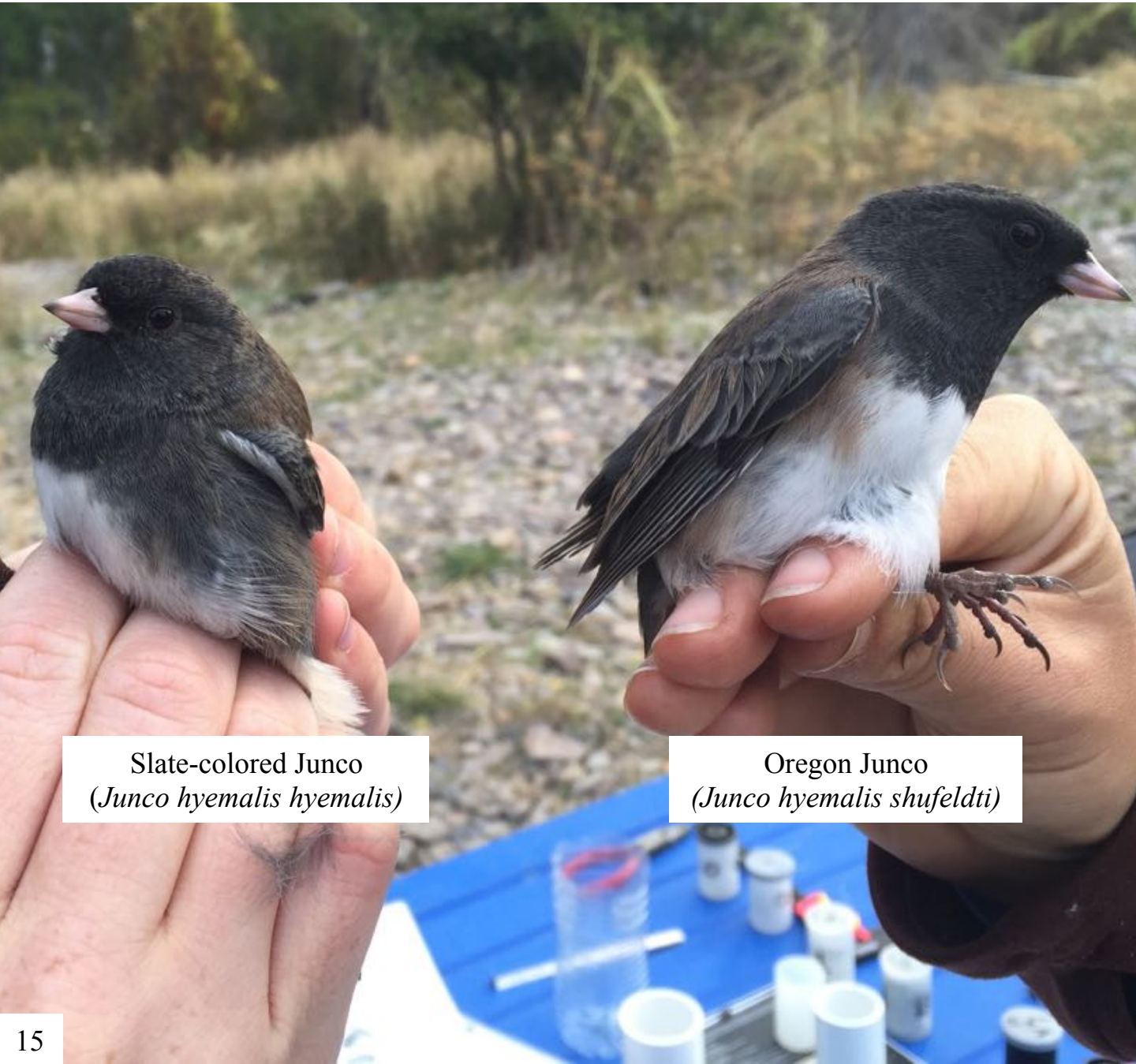
Species and deployment date

- Prairie Falcon 9/8
- Cooper's Hawk 1 9/9
- Peregrine Falcon 9/11
- Red-tailed Hawk 1 9/13
- Cooper's Hawk 2 9/18
- Red-tailed Hawk 2 9/19
- Red-tailed Hawk 3 9/23



During week six of fall migration banding, we captured 365 birds. Although our biggest days were at the Floodplain and Ridge sites (56 birds captured at each site), we caught more birds at Sheep Camp (131 captures). Classic fall weather conditions prevailed; we experienced near-freezing sunrise temperatures that warmed into the 70s by noon.

We used flank coloration to distinguish between two subspecies of the Dark-eyed Junco. The Oregon Junco is more common in western Montana.



Slate-colored Junco
(*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*)

Oregon Junco
(*Junco hyemalis shufeldti*)

We captured a striking Williamson's Sapsucker at the Ridge. Both sexes have a yellow belly wash, but only males display the bold black breast and upperparts, red throat, and white stripes by the mouth and eye.



The tiny Wilson's Warbler weighs only about 7 grams. The large, glossy black cap indicates a male.



Different color crown stripes help us differentiate between adult and juvenile White-crowned Sparrows.



Northern Pygmy-owls are one of the tiniest owls in North America, but they are feisty and ferocious. This season, we've captured one Northern Pygmy-owl at Sheep Camp and four at the Ridge. This week we captured the banded breeding male from the nest near the Ridge. Our banding site is less than 0.25 miles from the nest tree.



