

Raptor View Research Update: Fall Migration 2012

October 12

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Fall 2012 Raptor Migration Count

The sluggish, summer-like weather refuses to change. Smoke and low visibility have been the norm this entire fall migration. A high-pressure system has been parked over Montana for months, with the exception of a couple days. Above-average temperatures and cloud-less skies continue to make observations difficult. We are curious to see if raptors are waiting out the warm weather extending across the northern latitudes. With only a few weeks left of a typical migration season, the next cold front should give us an answer. Starting October 13, the forecast is cool and wet for the next ten days.



This northern harrier comes back for multiple attacks on the owl. Last year, MPG had one of the highest counts of northern harriers in the state¹

During this count session, our best counts occurred on days when a brief cold front moved through. The clouds were a welcome change and we had three days with over 50 birds. We counted 90 raptors on October 5th, close to a season daily high. Red-tailed hawk numbers have started to pick up. We expect their numbers to rise and accipiter numbers to start dropping after another surge from the coming weather change. Eagles and rough-legged hawks have begun their migration through the region. We noticed the local golden eagles flying high, escorting some of the migrants on their way. We had our first ferruginous hawk of the season on October 5th. We now have detected 17 species, which is likely our highest attainable number. Any additional raptor species would be rare, and would include the red-shouldered hawk and gyrfalcon. Local birder Wayne Tree observed a young red-shouldered hawk in the Bitterroot Valley on our big count day, October 5th.

Daily Raptor Counts on the MPG Ranch as of October 11, 2012			
Species	Week Total 10/1-10/11	Month Total	Season Total
Turkey Vulture	5	5	23
Osprey	7	7	27
Bald Eagle	6	6	8
Northern Harrier	37	37	91
Sharp-shinned Hawk	91	91	315
Cooper's Hawk	29	29	97
Northern Goshawk	8	8	13
Broad-winged Hawk	0	0	25
Red-tailed Hawk	150	150	332
Rough-legged Hawk	10	10	10
Swainson's Hawk	2	2	7
Ferruginous Hawk	1	1	1
Golden Eagle	14	14	15
American Kestrel	24	24	181
Merlin	4	4	6
Peregrine Falcon	0	0	4
Prairie Falcon	3	3	5
Unknown Accipiter	3	3	19
Unknown Buteo	2	2	10
Unknown Falcon	0	0	0
Unknown Eagle	0	0	0
Unknown Raptor	7	7	7
Total:	396	396	1196

Fall 2012 Banding

Most migrating raptors have been skirting past the Baldy Mountain Complex at low elevations. This flight pattern makes trapping difficult, as many of the birds migrating past don't get high enough to see our lures. We hope the more typical seasonal weather scheduled to hit next week will get more birds moving high. If precipitation reduces the amount of smoke we expect thermal lift to increase. Hopefully this will amount to an increased number of migrants that pass through our banding station.

This week's trapping efforts have brought our capture total to above 50. Sharp-shinned hawks continue to dominate our captures. We were surprised at our northern goshawk capture rate. We only counted 8 migrating goshawks in this session, and managed to catch two of these individuals. Both were juvenile birds.

Capture Totals on the MPG Ranch as of October 11, 2012			
Species	Week Total 10/1-10/11	Month Total	Season Total
Northern Pygmy Owl	0	0	1
Northern Harrier	0	0	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	11	11	33
Cooper's Hawk	0	0	4
Northern Goshawk	2	2	4
Red-tailed Hawk	1	1	6
American Kestrel	0	0	1
Peregrine Falcon	0	0	2
Prairie Falcon	0	0	1
Total:	14	14	54



The scarlet color of this adult Sharp-shinned Hawk takes years to develop.²



The amount of fat stored in the wing pit provides insight on the overall condition of migrating raptors. This sharp-shinned hawk had an unusually high amount of fat, suggesting she is well prepared for migration.²

Golden Eagle Tracking

As expected, both adult golden eagles started moving south since our last update. While the female spent the summer season ~600 miles northwest of the male, they were only ~75 miles apart when last recorded due to her earlier departure. We are excited to see if they arrive to the Bitterroot Valley at similar times.

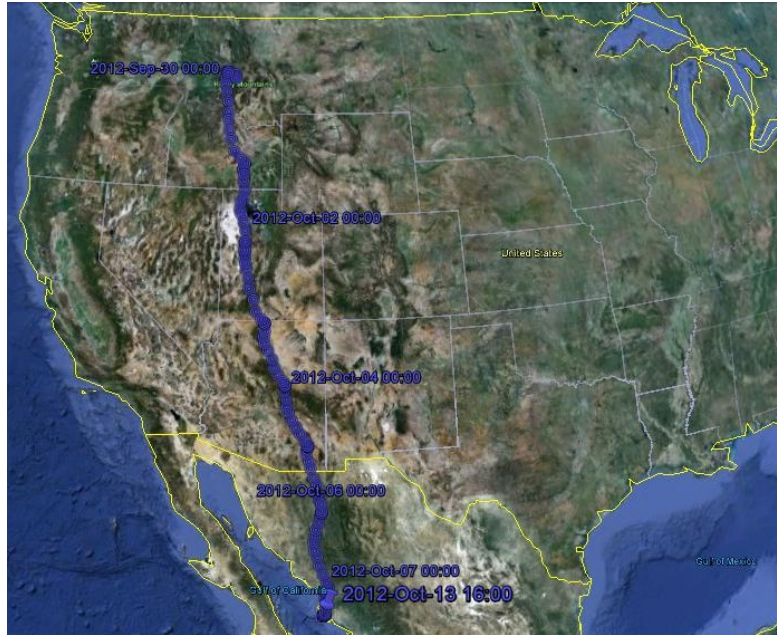


The female golden eagle is in red, the male in blue.

Osprey Tracking

The osprey have all been relatively sedentary for the past few days. Compared to that of the young, the routes of the adult osprey seem very direct. Three of the four young seem to be making random, small scale movements; we expect them to move further south as winter approaches.

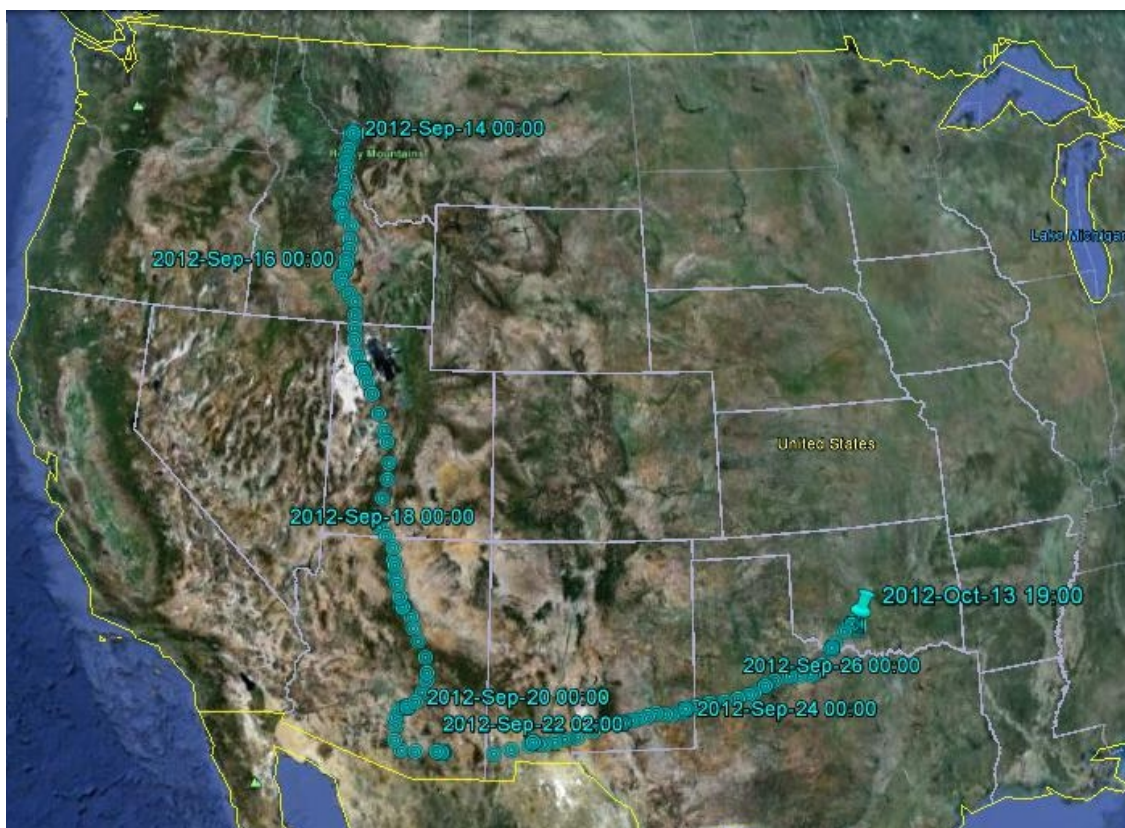
Ranch Entrance Nest:



Adult Male



Adult Female

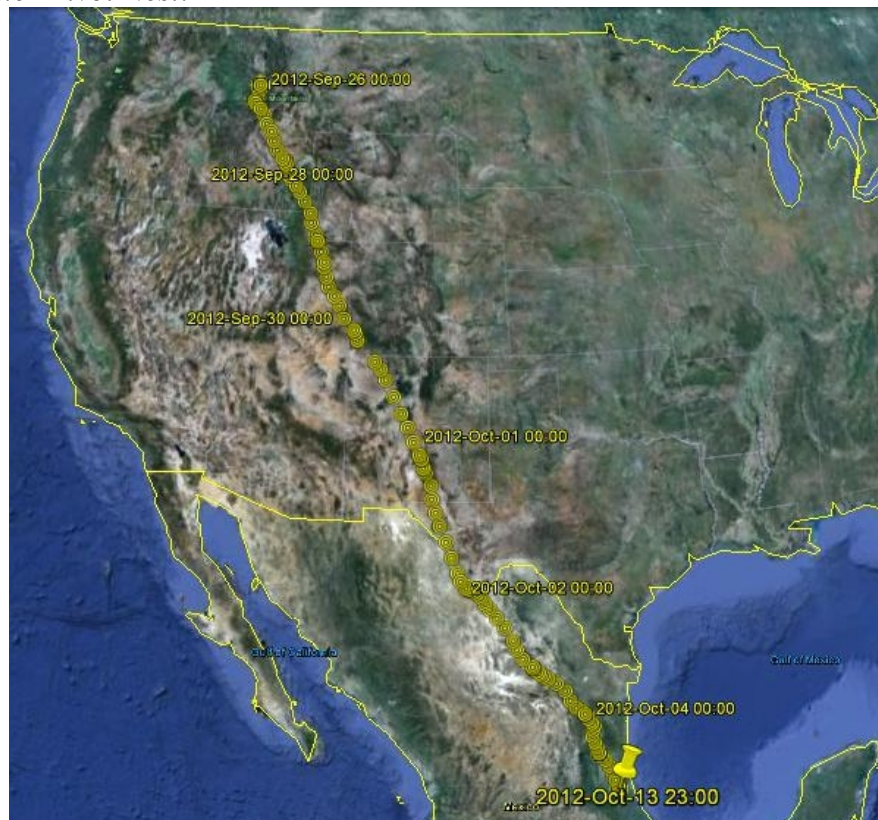


Young 1

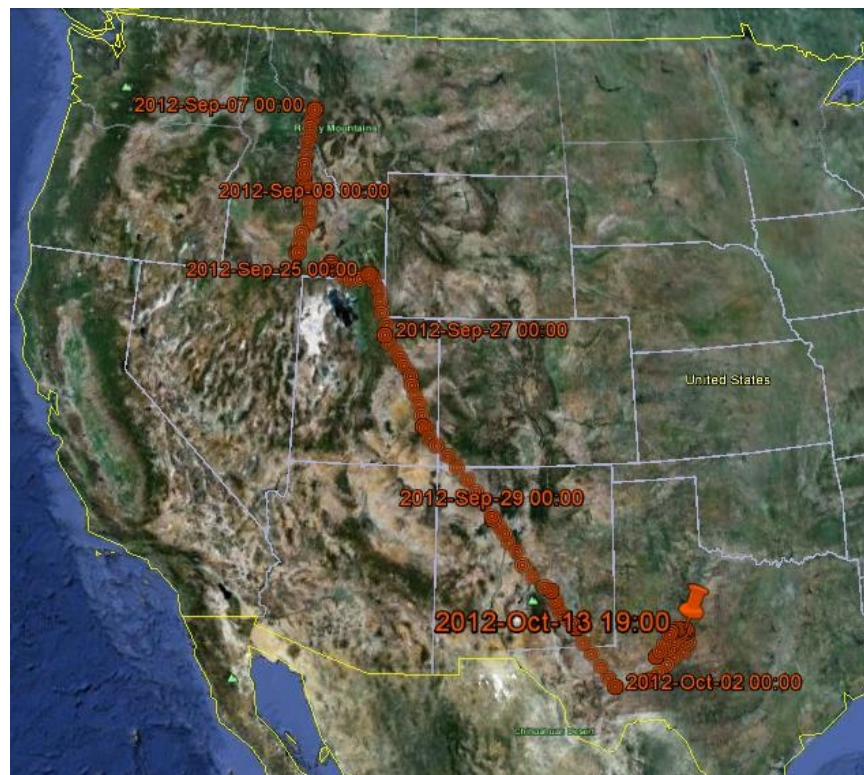


Young 2

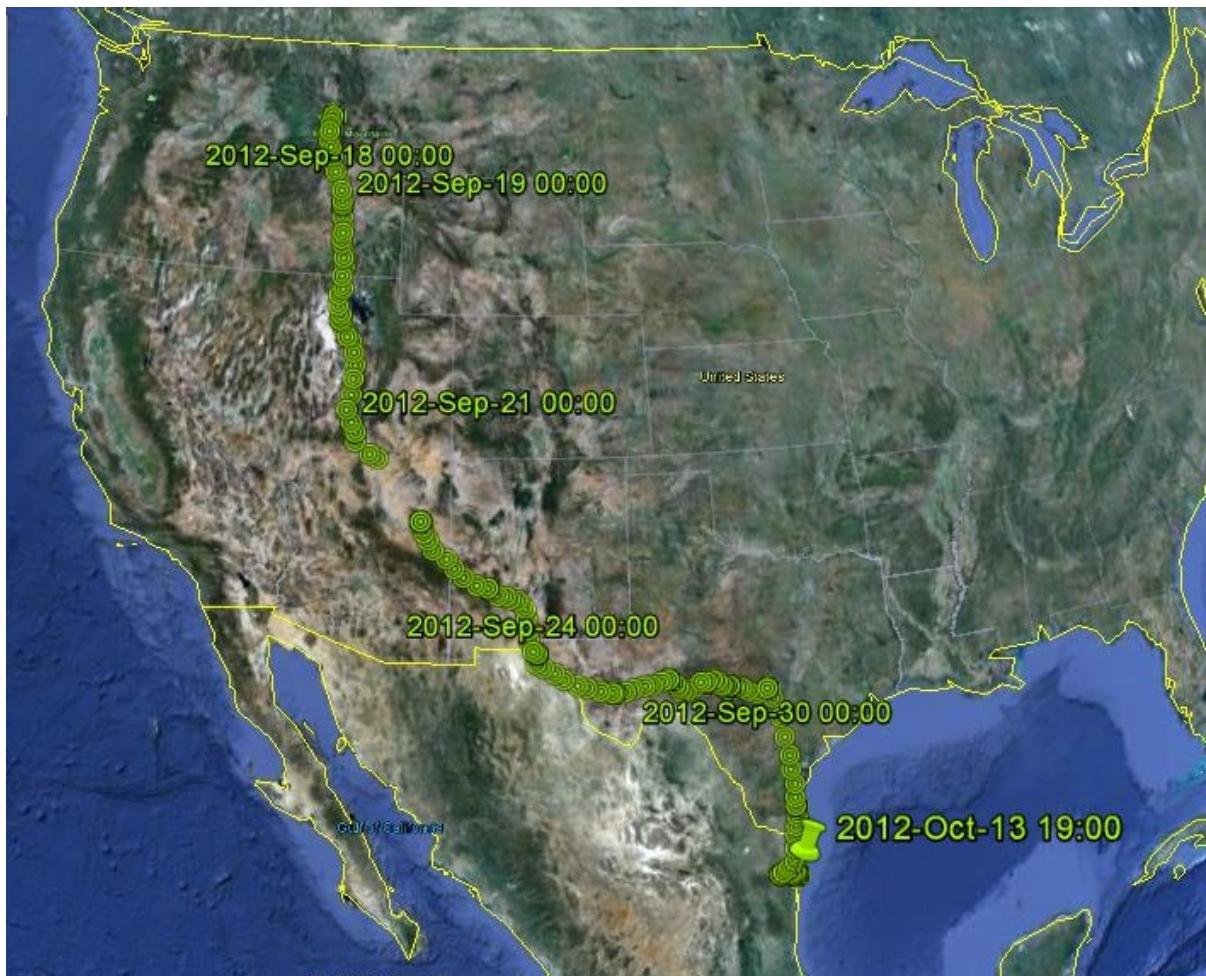
North Center Pivot Nest:



Adult Male



Young 1



Young 2