
THE EAGLE HAS LANDED: WINTER EAGLE RESEARCH TAKES FLIGHT IN THE BITTERROOT VALLEY

Kate Stone* MPG Ranch, Florence, MT

Adam Shreading* Raptor View Research Institute, Missoula, MT

We began capturing Golden Eagles on the MPG Ranch in the Bitterroot Valley in 2011. Though we began with the intent of using satellite transmitters to learn about the habitat use and migration paths of adult, overwintering Golden Eagles, our research has evolved to encompass placing auxiliary markers on Golden and Bald Eagles of all ages. We also test eagles for environmental contaminants. So far we have captured and marked more than 75 Golden and 20 Bald Eagles. Due to these markers, we've amassed an impressive archive of eagle re-sightings in the Bitterroot Valley and other locations, including Washington and British Columbia. We've also learned that the majority of eagles captured show signs of lead exposure, likely from the ingestion of lead ammunition fragments. This year, we expanded efforts to study wintering eagles throughout the Bitterroot Valley. We've joined forces with Bitterroot Audubon and private landowners to set out carcass and camera stations on private lands throughout the valley. These efforts should increase the likelihood of re-encountering our marked eagles, demonstrate the value of private lands to eagles and other scavengers, and engage people from a variety of backgrounds with our research. We will share preliminary results from this collaboration, including impressive camera “captures” of Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, and other scavengers. We will also share information about the public platform we are using to crowd-source image identification; this platform is available for other camera-trapping projects in Montana.