

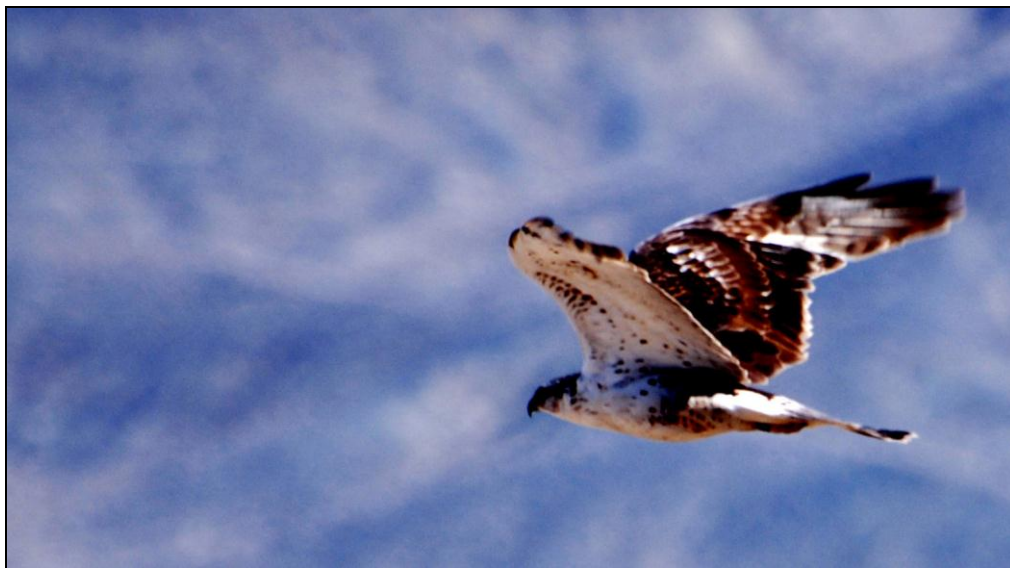
Bristlecone Audubon



Newsletter 008 –1 January 2011

Northeast Nevada's Winter Bird Counts

By the time most of you read this, our 2010 *Christmas Bird Count* will be history. These surveys along with others like our *Wintering Birds of Prey Survey* and our *Great Backyard Bird Count* can reveal changes in species distribution and relative abundance of wildlife populations over time. This in turn can help us determine the health and resiliency of our native ecosystems. Some scientists suggest that wintering ferruginous hawks, for example, may be responding to changes in global climate and wintering



Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) with White Mountains in background, Esmeralda County, Nevada, January 2009 (Photo Courtesy of Teri Slatauski).

in larger numbers farther north than in previous decades and centuries. Although winter records have been kept for only the last 20 years, 2009 proved a record winter for ferruginous hawks in Nevada. What makes this especially interesting is that prior to 2009, the species had rarely been discussed in terms of its contribution to Nevada's wintering bird of prey totals. Most wintering ferruginous hawk increases were documented in mid-tier Nevada counties. The species certainly bears watching in coming years.



House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) waiting out the storm, Spring Creek, Nevada, December 2010. In flight, one male reveals, rather dramatically, he most certainly is not a Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*).

The rum patch is a dead giveaway. (Photo courtesy of John Norby, Member, Bristlecone Audubon).

To some, perhaps less sexy are data that confirm abundance of our more common species; the house finches, the sharp-shinned hawks, the American dippers of field and mountain. To the contrary, abundance of common species may be one of our more important indicators of healthy, stable ecosystems. Often, by the time rarity is confirmed in a species or population, it can become too late to affect positive change. If, for example, we'd kept a closer eye on the five billion passenger pigeons in North America, we could have expected a different outcome. By 1914, there was one left.



Juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) taking a break from songbird hunting, Spring Creek, Nevada, December 2010. (Photo courtesy of John Norby, Member, Bristlecone Audubon).

The golden eagle is an example of a relatively common species for which, since about the early 1990s, concern has been rising. Until last year, numbers of wintering immature golden eagles had been dropping in the central Great Basin for over 16 years (Figure 1). Then, in 2009, participants in the *Wintering Birds of Prey Survey* seemed to heave a collective sigh of relief. Here's an excerpt from the 2009 report:

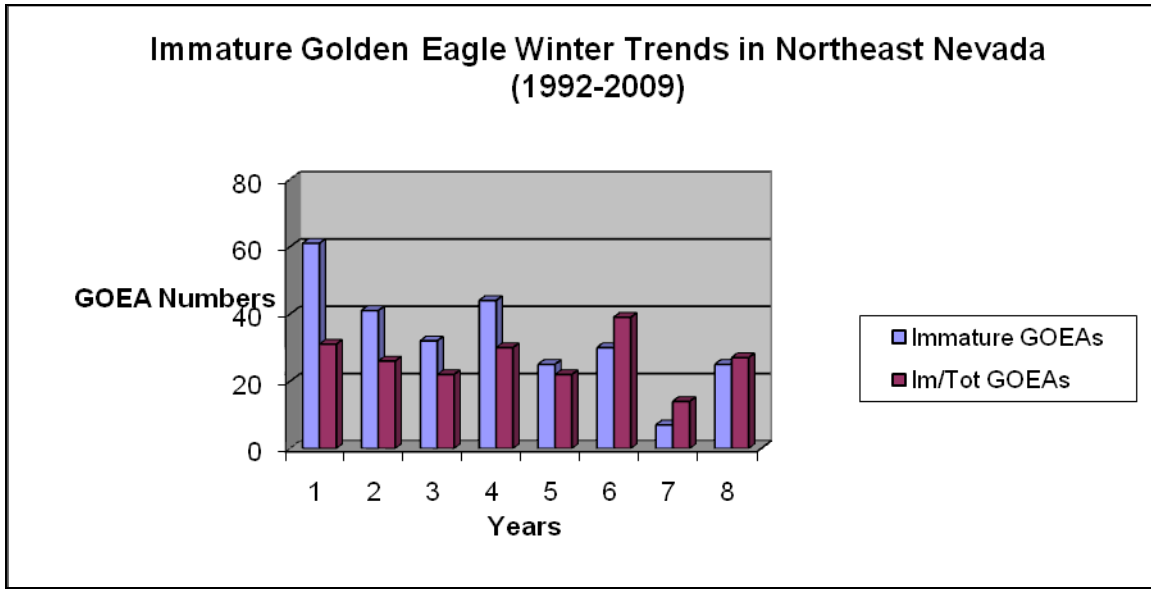


Figure 1. Immature golden eagle trends in northeast Nevada from 1992 to 2009
 (Blue Series = Total immature birds, Maroon Series = Immature birds as a percent of the total wintering golden eagle population).

‘Wintering golden eagles were documented in 13 of Nevada’s 17 counties and 32 of 45 survey routes in early 2009. Total golden eagle numbers for 2009 (136) compared favorably to numbers from 2008 (61) and 2007 (136). Corrected for survey effort, total numbers of wintering golden eagles in Nevada’s northeast region rose abruptly (48%) in 2009 and were above (4%) the 17-year average for the first time since 2001. Most of the increase was detected in Elko County. Even more encouraging was an increase in the documentation of immature birds. Young golden eagle numbers were up 257% from record lows in 2008 and comprised 27% of the total golden eagle tally in the northeast.’

Tentative Calendar for early 2011

- February 16** *What do Red-naped Sapsuckers and Silver-haired Bats share in common?* 6:30pm
- February 18-20** *Great Backyard Bird Count* *North America*
- April 2** *Buzzard Saturday BBQ* *Lamoille*
- May 28-30** *Birds Gone Wild* *Ruby Lake*

P.V. Bradley, Newsletter Editor, Bristlecone Audubon

Natural History Records: This just in: Melody and Michael confirmed the sighting of a northern cardinal in Ruby Valley last week!

