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Fall 2011 Bird Banding at Wildcat Hills Nature Center

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Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory has been operating a fall migration bird banding station at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center (WCH) in Scotts Bluff Co. since 2007. In 2011, during our fifth year of banding, we captured a few new species, had new high totals for other species, and had a record number new high total of recaptures. The Wildcat Hills Nature Center is surrounded by Ponderosa Pine woodland with a mixed shrub understory dominated by Mountain Mahogany. As such, it hosts bird species that are rarely found throughout the rest of the state, including Pygmy Nuthatch and Red Crossbill. In addition, common breeders in the area include Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Lazuli Bunting, Black-capped Chickadee, and Spotted Towhee. In the fall, high numbers of various finches move through the area, including American and Lesser Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, Red Crossbill, House Finch, and the occasional Cassin's Finch.

Weather permitting, we banded on weekdays from August 31 through October 10 for five hours per day beginning soon after sunrise. We caught and banded 735 individual birds of 32 species, our second highest season total since 855 birds in 2010. We banded two new species for the station in 2011: one Red-eyed Vireo and one Black-headed Grosbeak. Chipping Sparrow set a new high as the most frequently captured species, with 245 individuals, up from 162 in 2010. Red Crossbill was the second highest species at 153, which was a decline from a high of 323 in 2010, though still an impressive number for this nomadic species. Also of note, we captured a new high of 45 Lesser Goldfinches. This species has expanded greatly in the Wildcat Hills in the last five years. We caught only six Lesser Goldfinches in 2010 and none from 2007-2009. Among our Lesser Goldfinch captures this year was an adult female with a brood patch, confirming that the species is now breeding in the area. Eighteen birds captured in 2011 were recaptures, including 12 birds from 2010. This new high number of recaptures included five Black-capped Chickadees, five Red Crossbills, four Spotted Towhees, and four Chipping Sparrows.

The complete list of species and individuals banded during 2011 is as follows:

Downy Woodpecker- 2
Hairy Woodpecker- 3
Northern "Red-Shafted" Flicker- 1
Western Wood-Pewee- 2
Plumbeous Vireo- 1
Blue-headed Vireo- 1
Red-eyed Vireo- 1
Black-capped Chickadee- 47
Red-breasted Nuthatch- 5
Pygmy Nuthatch- 12
House Wren- 4

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher-	6
Eastern Bluebird-	8
Mountain Bluebird-	1
Orange-crowned Warbler-	7
Yellow Warbler-	1
"Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler-	6
"Myrtle" Yellow-rumped Warbler-	1
Intermediate Yellow-rumped Warbler-	1
Wilson's Warbler-	1
Spotted Towhee-	43
Chipping Sparrow-	245
Clay-colored Sparrow-	1
Vesper Sparrow-	1
"Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow-	12
"Oregon" Dark-eyed Junco-	3
Black-headed Grosbeak-	1
Lazuli Bunting-	6
Cassin's Finch-	2
House Finch-	16
Red Crossbill-	153
Pine Siskin-	44
Lesser Goldfinch-	45
American Goldfinch-	52