
American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*

Aves — Charadriiformes — Recurvirostridae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Secure breeding (S5B)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: No status
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Declining trends; Intermountain West primary breeding area.

TAXONOMY

No known subspecies.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The distribution of the American avocet is dependent on suitable local habitats (Robinson et al. 1997). American avocets breed primarily in the Great Basin, central Midwest from south Alberta and Saskatchewan, south through central Nebraska, west Kansas and Oklahoma, and north Texas, west to central New Mexico. They also breed in scattered locations along the California and south Texas coastlines. The global population of American avocets is estimated to be 450,000 adults (Morrison et al. 2001). Up to half of this population breeds in the Great Basin (Oring et al. 2000). In Idaho, the current population size of this species, which nests in the southern half of the state, is unknown.

POPULATION TREND

After an apparent population increase in the U.S. (+7.9% per year) during the period 1966–1979, Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate no population change during the period 1980–2004 and 1966–2004 (Sauer et al. 2005). In the western BBS region, no change was detected in any of these 3 time periods. In contrast, BBS data indicate sharp declines in the Basin and Range physiographic region during all 3 time periods: 1966–1979 (-14.5% per year; not statistically significant), 1980–2004 (-18.7% per year), and 1966–2004 (-18.2% per year; Sauer et al. 2005). In Idaho, declines also were suggested during the periods 1980–2004 (-6.2% per year) and 1966–2004 (-1.7% per year), but neither of these were statistically significant and detection rates along BBS routes were very low (Sauer et al. 2005).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

American avocets breed in potholes, shallow alkaline wetlands, impoundments, evaporation ponds, and mudflats of inland lakes (Robinson et al. 1997). Generally

associated with wetlands containing bulrush, cattails, and sedges, although individuals spend most of their time, and place their nests, in more open areas that have no vegetation or very sparse vegetation (Robinson et al. 1997). Nests scrapes are constructed on islands or dikes with sparse vegetation, and will not use islands that are used for breeding by American white pelicans, California gulls, or ring-billed gulls (Robinson et al. 1997). However, American avocets have been observed breeding in colonies with Forster's terns and black-necked stilts (Robinson et al. 1997; C. Moulton, IDFG, pers. comm.). American avocets usually forage for aquatic invertebrates in open water that is <20 cm (<7.9 in) deep, but also will swim in water that is too deep for wading (Robinson et al. 1997).

ISSUES

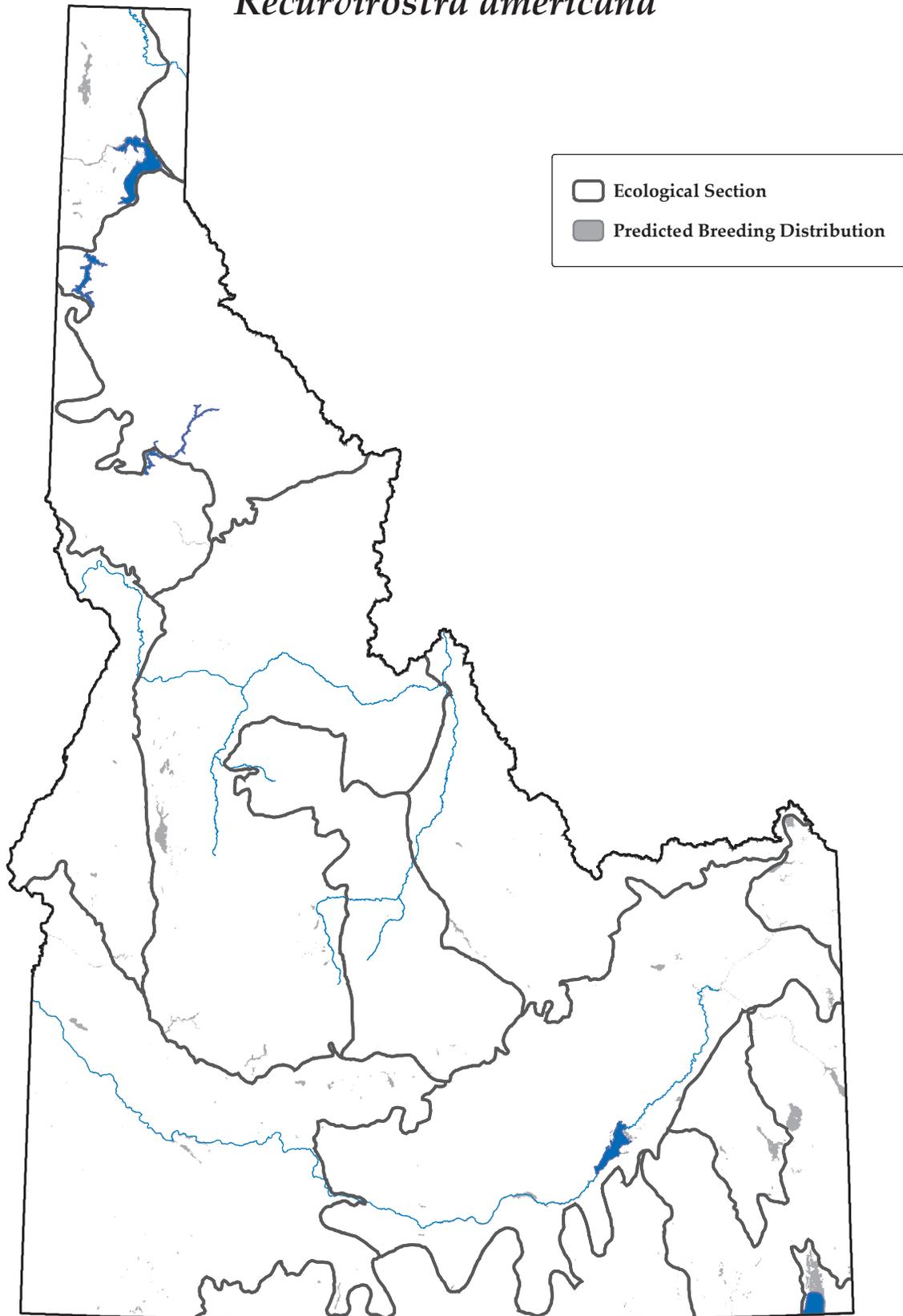
Shooting and trapping led to population declines before the 1900s; illegal shooting and trapping may be a minor source of mortality currently (Robinson et al. 1997). Many wetlands in the western U.S. that American avocets use for nesting have been contaminated, particularly by Selenium, as a result of irrigation and other human activities (USFWS 1992). Loss of wetland habitat has led to American avocet declines (Page and Gill 1994). This species also is susceptible to disturbance at the nest site, particularly during the early nesting stages, and is often subject to nest destruction resulting from routing levee grading (Robinson et al. 1997). Human induced increases in predation are a serious problem for breeding shorebirds in the Intermountain West (Oring et al. 2000).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Coordinate with the Intermountain West Joint Venture to address wetland habitat and management needs (Oring et al. 2000). Monitor American Avocets for any contamination issues. Establish monitoring of nesting sites on a regular basis, using the Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey (IBIS) framework. Foster research focused on the interactions between American avocets and primary predators (e.g., canids, corvids, larids; Oring et al. 2000).

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Map created on September 21, 2005
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.
Sources: Predicted distribution is from the Wildlife Habitat
Relationships Models (WHR), A Gap Analysis of Idaho:
Final Report. Idaho Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research
Unit, Moscow, ID (Scott et al. 2002). Predicted distribution
is approximate (for more information, go to
http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap_report.asp).

