
American White Pelican

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos

Aves — Pelecaniformes — Pelecanidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Vulnerable (G3)
Statewide: Critically imperiled breeding (S1B)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: Rangewide/Globally imperiled (Type 2)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Low breeding and disjunct populations in Idaho; vulnerable throughout range.

TAXONOMY

There are no known subspecies. The taxonomic position of Pelecanidae is uncertain. Recent evidence suggests the Pelecanidae, including all *Pelecanus* spp., are more closely related to new world vultures and storks than other members of Pelecaniformes (Evans and Knopf 1993).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

American white pelicans breed in scattered locations from south–central British Columbia, north Alberta, northeast Saskatchewan, central Manitoba, southwest Ontario, north Minnesota, west through the Dakotas, north Montana, Wyoming, north Colorado, south Idaho and north Utah to west Nevada, north California and south Oregon (Evans and Knopf 1993). The North American population is estimated to be at 120,000 breeding pelicans with 2770 of these estimated to be in Idaho (Ivey and Herziger 2005). Two nesting colonies are known in Idaho, Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge and Blackfoot Reservoir, both in the southeastern part of the state.

POPULATION TREND

In the U.S., Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate a non–significant decline (–7.7% per year) during the period 1966–1979, a significant increase (+4.1% per year) during the period 1980–2004, and an overall non–significant increase (+2.8% per year) from 1966–2004; Sauer et al. 2005). Population trends for the Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) which include Idaho, BCR9 (Great Basin) and BCR10 (Northern Rocky Mountains), are reported as being uncertain (Ivey and Herziger 2005). Surveys at Blackfoot Reservoir, 1 of Idaho’s 2 known nesting colonies, indicate an increase in nesting birds from the 1990s, when birds were first successful in nesting after being extirpated from the island in the 1970s, to the present population of 1400 breeding pairs (Trost 1985, Trost and Gerstell 1994, Teuscher et al. 2004; Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey [IBIS], unpubl. data).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

White pelicans breed mainly on isolated islands in freshwater lakes or reservoirs. They forage on inland marshes, lakes, or rivers. Low site tenacity and high mobility appear to be important adaptations allowing pelicans to shift colony sites to take advantage of rich food supplies as they become available. Winter habitat includes southern and western coastal marine habitats. Pelicans favor shallow coastal bays, inlets and estuaries that have forage fish and loafing sites. During spring and fall migration birds stop at aquatic foraging and loafing areas similar to those used during breeding season. Diet is predominantly fish, but also includes salamanders and crayfish. Adults are estimated to eat about 1.8 kg (4.0 lb) per day (Evans and Knoph 1993). Normal clutch is 2 eggs and incubation time is about 30 days. The smaller chick usually dies within the first or second week. Young fledge at 10–11 weeks. Breeding typically begins at 3 years and probably is annual thereafter (Evans and Knoph 1993). Both parents attend the nest during incubation and brooding, with each spending about half their time at the colony and half at foraging sites. Nocturnal foraging is common during breeding (McMahon and Evans 1992).

ISSUES

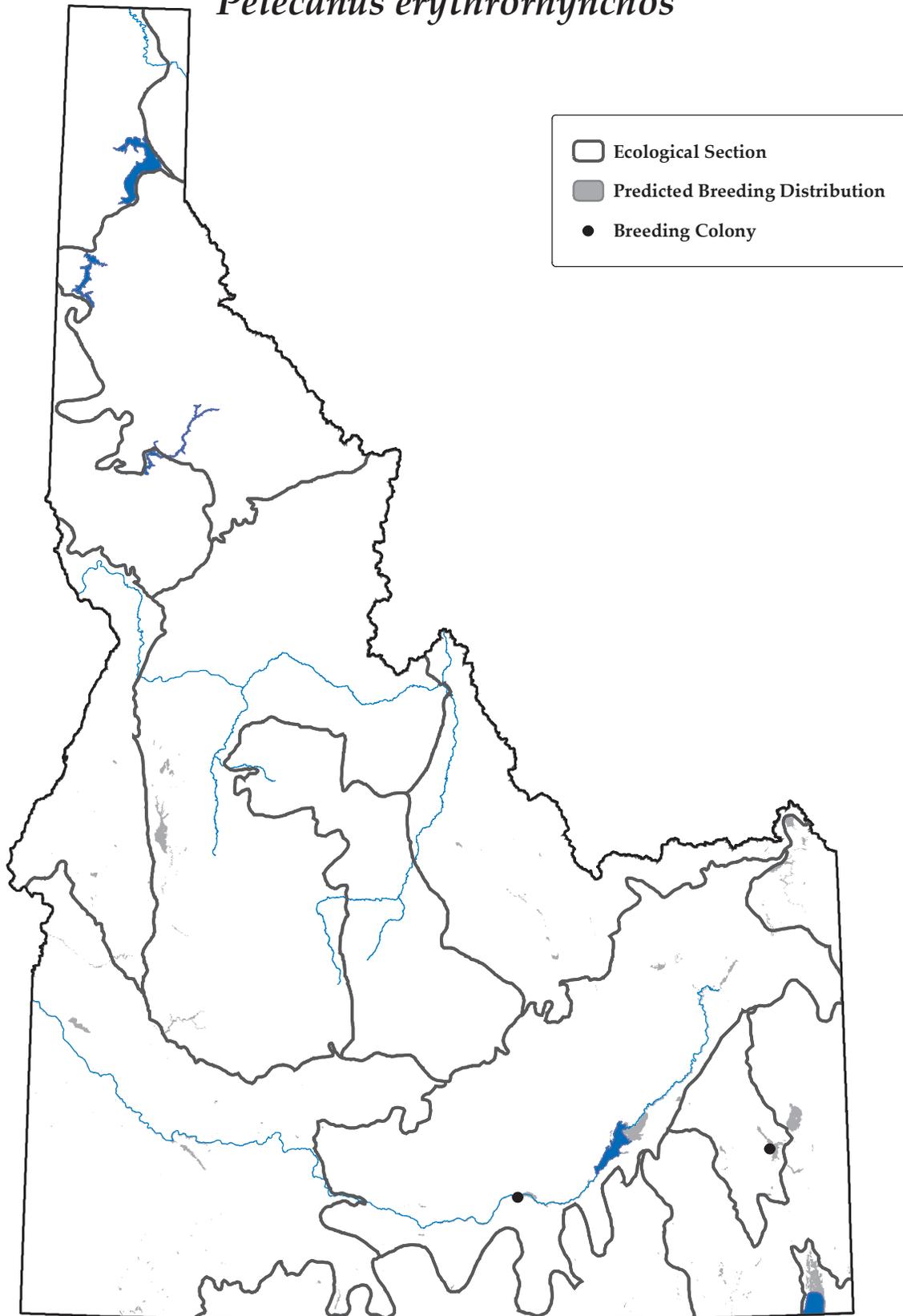
Habitat loss due to either flooding or draining areas can destroy breeding sites and foraging areas (Evans and Knopf 1993). Human disturbance at breeding colonies can pose a threat, particularly during courtship and early incubation (Evans and Knopf 1993). Shooting is the greatest source of mortality reported from band returns to the USFWS (Evans and Knoph 1993), and is reportedly the main cause of the desertion of the Blackfoot Reservoir nesting island in the early 1970s (Trost and Gerstell 1994). Conflicts between American white pelicans and fish populations have escalated in recent years, particularly at Blackfoot Reservoir, such that pelicans may be impacting the native Yellowstone cutthroat trout population, as well as hatchery fish stocks (R. Scully, IDFG, pers. comm.).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Protect and maintain wetland habitats and water levels. Consistent monitoring of existing breeding colonies should be implemented, through the Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey (IBIS) program, such that all colonies are surveyed every 3 years following the monitoring plan outlined in the Intermountain West Waterbird Conservation Plan (Ivey and Herziger 2005). Protect colonies from disturbance and educate the public about this concern. Educate the public about foraging habits and food preference.

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Map created on September 27, 2005
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.
Sources: Point data are from Idaho Conservation Data Center,
Idaho Department of Fish and Game (2005). 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).

