
Black Swift

Cypseloides niger

Aves — Apodiformes — Apodidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Apparently secure (G4)
Statewide: Critically imperiled breeding (S1B)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: Sensitive; Region 4: No status
BLM: Peripheral (Type 4)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Restricted distribution and low population size in Idaho.

TAXONOMY

Three subspecies are recognized with smallest forms in the West Indies (*C. n. niger*); larger on the mainland, showing clinal increase in size from south (Costa Rica; *C. n. costaricensis*) to north (Canada and United States; *C. n. borealis*) (Lowther and Collins 2002).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The black swift breeds in isolated pockets in western North America from southeastern Alaska and western Canada, south to southern California, northern Idaho, northwestern Montana, Colorado, Utah, northern New Mexico, and southeastern Arizona (Wiggins 2004). Population densities are never high except in some British Columbia locations. Wintering range is thought to cover much of Central America yet sightings are rare (Lowther and Collins 2002). In Idaho, black swifts have been confirmed breeding at Shadow and Fern Falls along the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River, Shoshone County (Dumroese et al. 2001). Summer sightings of black swifts have been made in Boundary, Bonner, Shoshone, Clearwater, and Idaho counties.

POPULATION TREND

North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data suggest a long-term decline (1980–2004) (Sauer et al. 2005), yet the BBS is an inadequate survey technique for the black swift, due, in part, to this species' limited breeding distribution and inaccessible breeding habitat (Schultz and Levad 2001).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Known breeding populations of black swifts are closely associated with mountain waterfalls, caves, or coastal cliffs (Schultz and Levad 2001, Wiggins 2004). Other nesting habitat requirements appear to be flowing surface water, cliff sites that are inaccessible from ground predators, ledges or pockets on cliff walls, unobstructed aerial access, shaded nest site, and moss availability. Black swifts are aerial insectivores. Where adequate space allows, nesting is often colonial. Nests are placed on rock

ledges and are made of moss and mud. Nest sites are commonly reused in subsequent years. Clutch size is generally 1 egg. Nestling growth is slow with young leaving the nest 47–50 days after hatching.

ISSUES

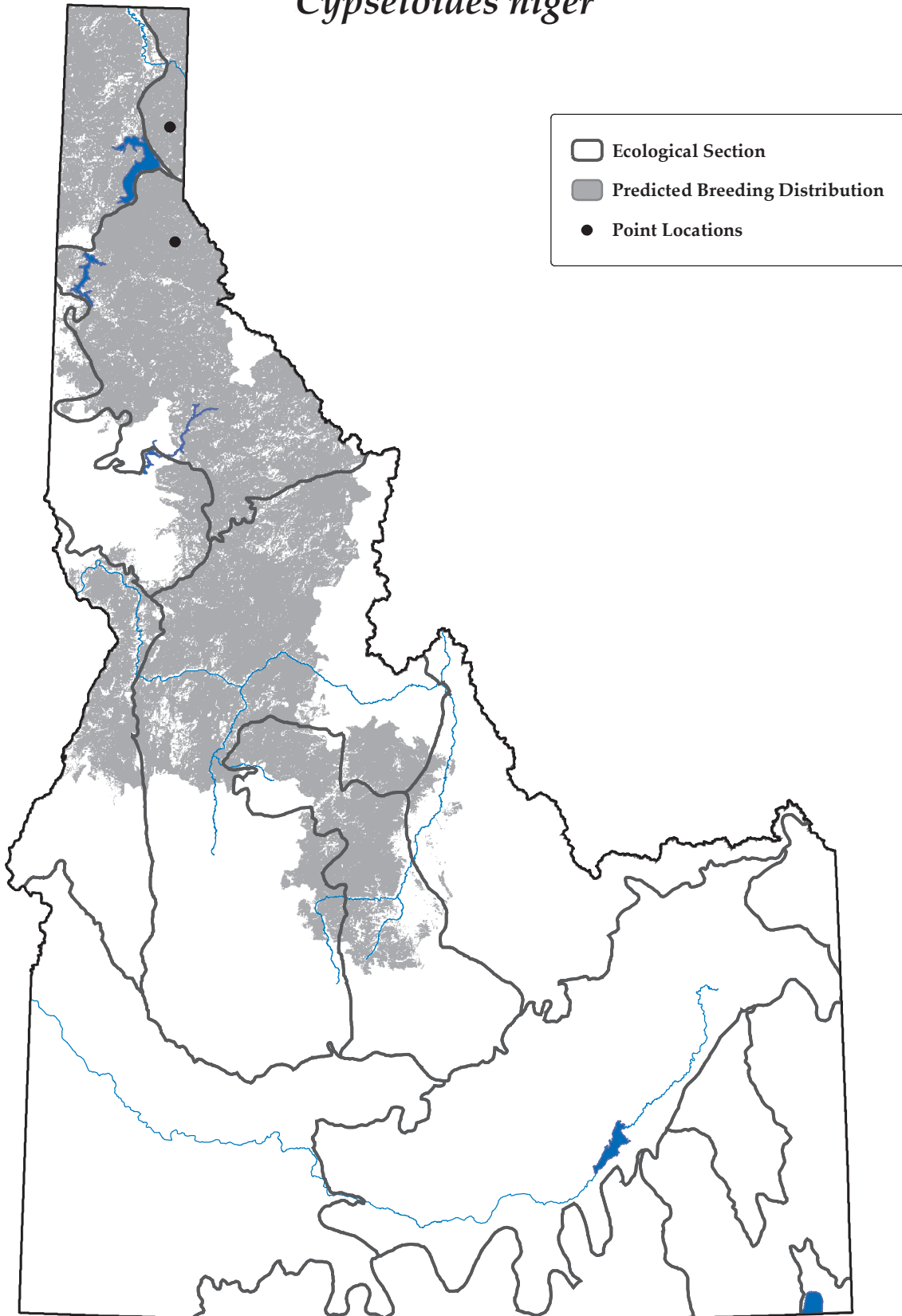
A clearer picture of the species' breeding distribution is needed to begin identifying issues of concern. Potential threats to nesting birds are forest management adjacent to nesting sites and stream flow alteration (Wiggins 2004). Low late summer water flows, along with other management activities, may affect nest site suitability and decrease the food (insect) supply. It is unclear whether pesticides affect the swift's food supply on the breeding or wintering grounds. Activity from recreational rock-climbers, hikers, cave explorers, and waterfall enthusiasts may disturb nesting birds, yet this is rarely witnessed.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Due to the extreme rarity of nesting sites, identification and protection of nesting sites is essential. Surveys of potential habitat are needed to acquire basic distribution information. If additional nest sites are found, effort is needed to acquire basic population size and trend data.

Black Swift

Cypseloides niger



Map created on September 22, 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).

