
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Aves — Charadriiformes — Laridae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Apparently secure (G4)
Statewide: Critically imperiled breeding (S1B)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: Regional/State imperiled (Type 3)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Limited breeding populations in Idaho; population trend is unknown.

TAXONOMY

There is no subspecies.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Black terns are localized breeders in the northern U.S. through central Canada. Population size of this species is unknown, although the U.S. breeding population is estimated to be in the low hundreds of thousands (Shuford 1999). In Idaho, the breeding population of terns is approximately 200 individuals (Ivey and Herziger 2005), nesting in 5–10 different locations per year (Trost and Gerstell 1994). In northern Idaho, Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Westmond Lake appear to be fairly consistent nesting locations for 30 and 15 pairs, respectively (C. Moulton, IDFG, pers. comm.).

POPULATION TREND

Black terns experienced a 61% decline during the 30-year period between 1966 and 1996, however the more recent trend is stable or slightly increasing (Shuford 1999). This also is reflected in Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data, which indicate sharp declines during the period 1966–1979 in the U.S. (-10.1% per year) and during the periods 1966–1979 (-5.4% per year), 1980–2004 (-3.3% per year), and 1966–2004 (-2.9% per year) in the western BBS region (Sauer et al. 2005). In contrast, BBS data indicate increases in the U.S. during the period 1980–2004 (+7.7% per year) and 1966–2004 (+2.8% per year) (Sauer et al. 2005). No trend information exists for Idaho resulting from insufficient numbers being detected on BBS routes.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Black terns are generally semi-colonially breeders (clusters of 11–50 nests) in shallow freshwater marshes with emergent vegetation (e.g., margins of lakes, ponds, rivers, islands, or sloughs) (Dunn and Agro 1995). As they have low site fidelity (Dunn 1979, Stern 1987), nesting locations can vary widely each year, depending on marsh habitat conditions. Black terns do not breed prior to their second summer, and some may delay

breeding beyond age 2. Reproductive success is relatively low, with less than 1 chick raised per nest on average (Dunn and Agro 1995). Unlike other North American terns, black terns feed predominantly on insects during the breeding season, as well as freshwater fish when available (Dunn and Agro 1995).

ISSUES

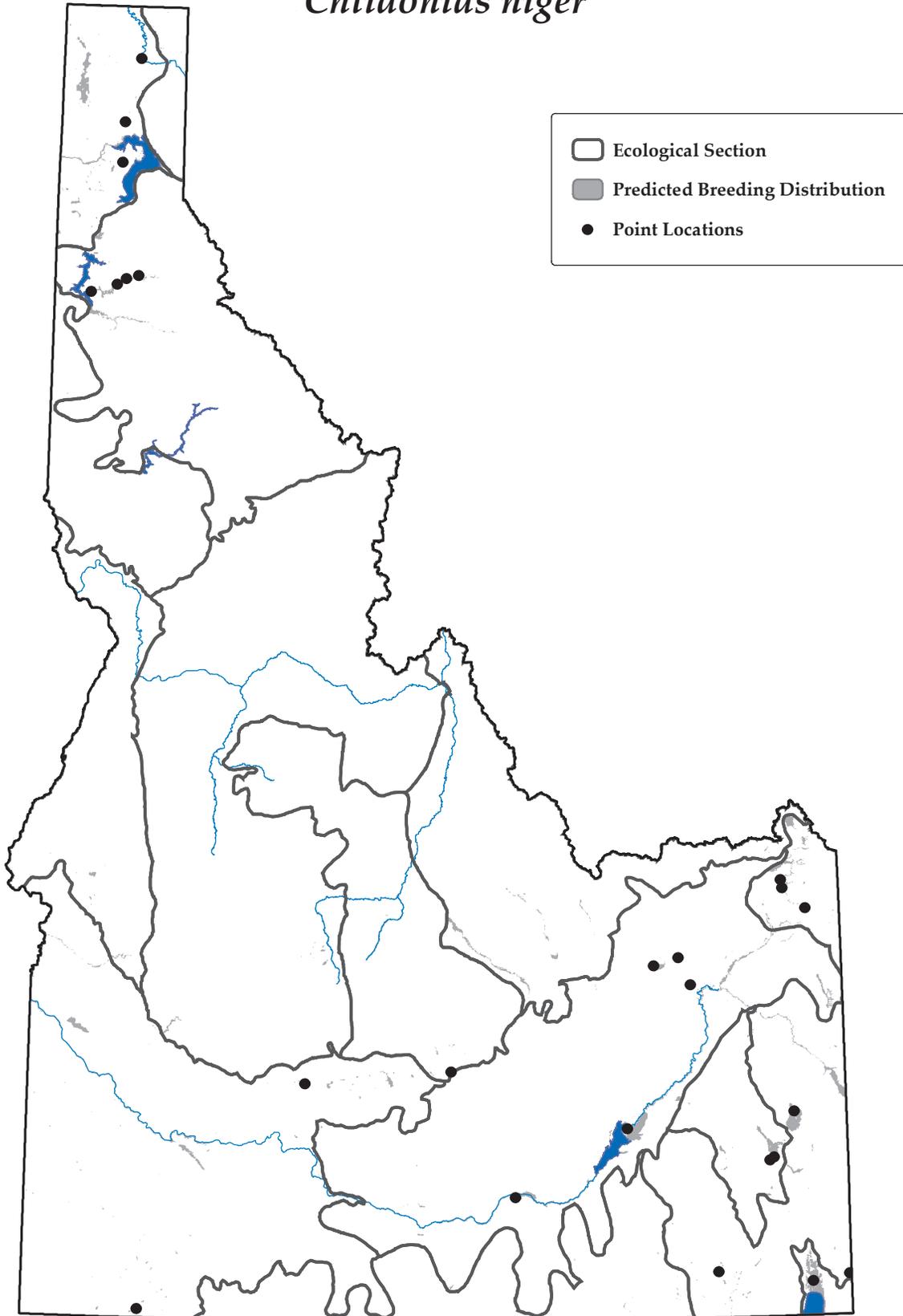
Greatest threat to black terns in Idaho is loss of marsh habitat resulting from extraction of ground water (Shuford 1999). Disturbance is a potential threat in some locations, although black terns appear to be tolerant of nearby human activity as long as the colony is not entered (Gerson 1987).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Of the known breeding locations, most (>90%) are within National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) or IDFG Wildlife Management Area (WMA) boundaries. The Kootenai NWR population is well-protected, with little or no public access near the nesting site and no hunting refuge-wide. Limiting access at other colonies during the nesting season should be investigated. In addition, because black terns respond well to artificial wetlands, including restored wetlands (Dunn and Agro 1995), efforts should be made to restore or create suitable marsh habitat in historic nesting areas.

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Map created on September 20, 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).

