
Black-crowned Night-Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Aves — Ciconiiformes — Ardeidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Imperiled breeding (S2B)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: No status
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Low breeding population in Idaho; concerns related to threats.

TAXONOMY

Of the 4 subspecies recognized (*N. n. nycticorax*, *N. n. hoactli*, *N. n. obscurus*, *N. n. falkandicus*), only *N. n. hoactli* is found in North America. The other 3 subspecies are found in South America, Europe, Japan, Africa, India, and the Falkland Islands (*N. n. falkandicus*; Davis 1993).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Black-crowned night-herons breed in North America from Washington and Quebec, east to New Brunswick, south through coastal Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico. There are an estimated 50,000 adult night-herons breeding in North America (Kushlan et al. 2000). In the Great Basin, there are approximately 2793 breeding pairs (Ivey and Herziger 2005). Of these, approximately 800 pairs breed in Idaho at multiple locations in the southern half of the state, including American Falls Reservoir, Bear Lake and Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuges, and Duck Valley Indian Reservation (Trost and Gerstell 1994).

POPULATION TREND

After many population declines were noted in the 1960s (Davis 1993), Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate population increases in the U.S. (+4.0% per year; statistically significant) and western BBS region (+ 3.6% per year) during the period 1966–2004, no change in the U.S., and increases in the western BBS region (+11.5% per year) during the period 1966–1979, and increases in the U.S. (+4.0% per year) and no change in the western BBS region during the period 1980–2004 (Sauer et al. 2005). No change in the Idaho population of black-crowned night-herons was detected by BBS data during these same periods (Sauer et al. 2005). The U.S. population recovery is likely a result of the banning of DDT (Davis 1993).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Although nest locations are highly variable, black-crowned night-herons in Idaho generally breed in mixed-species colonies on trees, shrubs, islands, and in emergents

(e.g., bulrush/cattail marsh; Trost and Gerstell 1994; C. Moulton, IDFG, pers. comm.). The nest of loosely woven twigs and sticks (Davis 1993) may be built at ground/water level or up to heights of 50 m (164 ft; Trost and Gerstell 1994). This species has crepuscular and nocturnal feeding habits, preying on fish, frogs, insects, and occasional small mammals and young birds (Davis 1993, Trost and Gerstell 1994). Because black-crowned night-herons are broadly distributed, high on the food chain, and tend to accumulate contaminants, they are good indicators of environmental health.

ISSUES

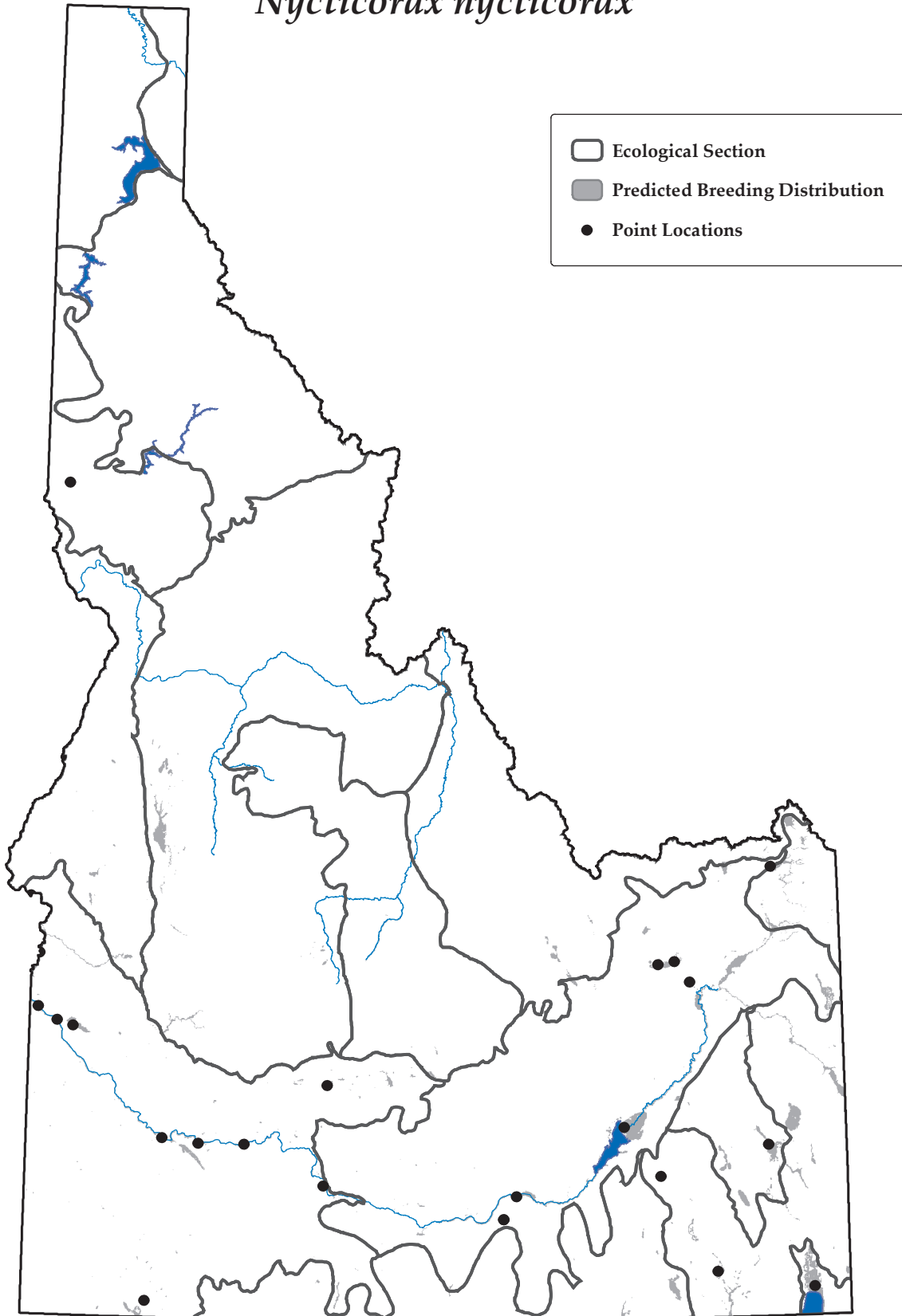
When water levels are low, grazing cattle may gain access to nesting islands and cause abandonment (Trost and Gerstell 1994). Conflicts with trout hatcheries in the Magic Valley also need to be addressed (Trost and Gerstell 1994). Presence of pesticides and other contaminants has been detected in black-crowned night-heron eggs and chicks in various locations throughout the U.S. through at least the late 1980s (Davis 1993, Ivey and Herziger 2005). Since Trost and Gerstell's (1994) study, no statewide assessment of breeding locations and colony sizes has been made.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Maintaining quality wetland and riparian habitats, including maintaining suitable water levels, is suggested for this species (Ivey and Herziger 2005). An assessment should be made of any conflicts between black-crowned night-herons and fish hatcheries in the Magic Valley region. Historic nesting locations (Trost and Gerstell 1994) should be visited to determine if they are still being used by this species, and potential new nesting locations should be explored. Consistent monitoring of the breeding colonies should be implemented, such as through 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).

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Map created on September 21, 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).

