
Blue Grosbeak

Guiraca caerulea

Aves — Passeriformes — Emberizidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide:	Secure (G5)
Statewide:	Critically imperiled breeding (S1B)
ESA:	No status
USFS:	Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM:	No status
IDFG:	Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Low and disjunct breeding populations in Idaho.

TAXONOMY

Seven subspecies have been described, 3 of which occur in the U.S.: *G. c. caerulea* of the southeastern and south-central U.S.; *G. c. interfusa* of the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico; and *G. c. salicaria* from the Central Valley and southwestern California south to northwestern Baja California (Ingold 1993). Which subspecies have been recorded in Idaho is unknown. There has been some tendency to merge the blue grosbeak into the genus *Passerina* (e.g., American Ornithologists' Union 1983), a group that also includes the indigo bunting (*Passerina cyanea*). Other work supports the retention of the genus *Guiraca* (Tamplin et al. 1993), suggesting that the blue grosbeak is more closely related to the rose-breasted grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) than members of the genus *Passerina* (Ingold 1993).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The blue grosbeak breeds from northern New Jersey west to central, interior California, northern Baja California south through Mexico and Central America; northernmost edge of range is south-central North Dakota (Ingold 1993). This species winters generally in Mexico and Middle America south to central Panama (Ingold 1993). In Idaho, the blue grosbeak occurs as an isolated (disjunct) breeding population based on a few records from the south-central region of the state. Two breeding pairs were initially recorded in 1967 approximately 2.4 km (1.5 mi) north of Glens Ferry, Elmore Co. (Powers 1969). The second breeding record was of a nest that successfully fledged 3 young near Buhl, Twin Falls Co. in 1981 (Rich and Trentlage 1981). Finally, Trost (1993) recorded a singing male at Daniels Reservoir northwest of Malad City, Oneida Co. Whether a small breeding population currently exists in this region of the state remains unclear.

POPULATION TREND

This species appears to be stable to increasing throughout its range. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data reveal statistically significant population increases at the level of the United States during the period 1966–2004 (1% per year), 1966–1979 (3.4%), and 1980–2004 (0.5%); in the western U.S., increases are only statistically significant during

the period 1966–1979 (8.7%) (Sauer et al. 2005). No trend information exists for Idaho due to insufficient numbers of the blue grosbeak being detected on BBS routes.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The blue grosbeak is a bird of more open country, being found in thickets and stretches of underbrush at the edges of fields and pastures (Burleigh 1972). Open slashings, such as those left after logging operations, appear to provide suitable habitat (Burleigh 1972, Ingold 1993). In Idaho, this species may nest in hayfields or chicory, Russian olive, willow, and wild rose thickets adjacent to sagebrush foothills (Groves et al. 1997a). The primary foods of the blue grosbeak are insects, snails, and seeds of wild and cultivated grasses (Bent 1968).

ISSUES

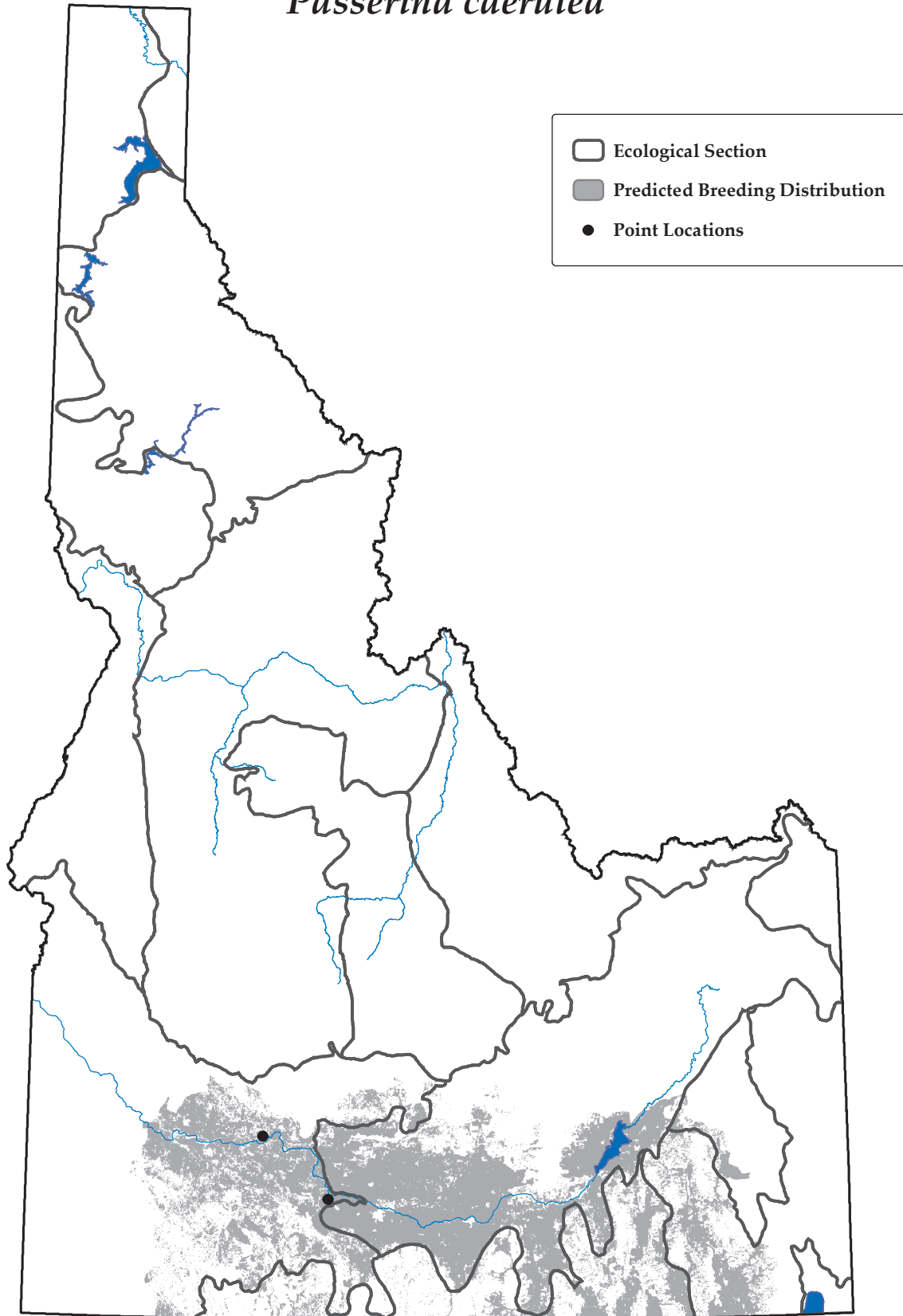
No published information on effects of human activity on this species, although populations may be expected to benefit from the abandonment of agricultural land where it breeds (Ingold 1993). Suburban habitats are generally not accepted by the blue grosbeak and so urban sprawl, especially into sagebrush foothills, may be detrimental (Ingold 1993).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The lack of basic information on the blue grosbeak makes it difficult to assess management or conservation actions. Presumably, removal of agricultural lands from production under some of the Farm Bill programs (e.g., Conservation Reserve Program) could benefit this species. Before specific conservation actions can be offered for birds in Idaho, more basic information on presence, abundance, breeding status, and distribution in the state is needed.

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Passerina caerulea



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).

