
Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

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; disjunct populations.

TAXONOMY

The generic position of the cattle egret is often disputed, being alternatively placed in *Ardea*, *Bubulcus*, and *Egretta*. Currently recognized by the American Ornithologists' Union as *Bubulcus ibis* (Telfair 1994).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Cattle egrets are a widespread species, breeding throughout the U.S., north to southern Canada, and south throughout Mexico, Central America, and West Indies. The global and North American population sizes of this species are unknown (Ivey and Herziger 2005). In the Great Basin, there are approximately 458 breeding pairs (Ivey and Herziger 2005). Of these, approximately 43 pairs breed in the southern half of Idaho at 5–7 sites, including Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area, American Falls Reservoir, and Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area (Trost and Gerstell 1994).

POPULATION TREND

Cattle egret populations appear to be stable or increasing throughout North America (Telfair 1994). In the United States, Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate a statistically significant increase of 3.8% per year from 1966–1979, then a decrease of 1.3% per year from 1980–2004 (Sauer et al. 2005). Over the entire BBS time period of 1966–2004, no statistically significant change was detected (Sauer et al. 2005). Because of low detection rates on BBS routes, no trend information is available for Idaho.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

In Idaho, cattle egrets generally breed in mixed-species colonies in willows or tamarisks along water, on islands, or in bulrush/cattail marshes (Telfair 1994, Trost and Gerstell 1994; C. Moulton, IDFG, pers. comm.). Nests are generally located off the ground, although may be located near water level in bulrush marshes (C. Moulton, IDFG, pers. comm.), at a height of 1–10 m (3–33 ft; Trost and Gerstell 1994). Cattle egrets forage in open pastures, fields, and meadows, usually in association with cattle or other livestock,

feeding primarily on insects (Trost and Gerstell 1994). This association with livestock has been studied extensively, and has been determined to be an evolved feeding strategy, where livestock stir up insects on which egrets feed (Telfair 1994).

ISSUES

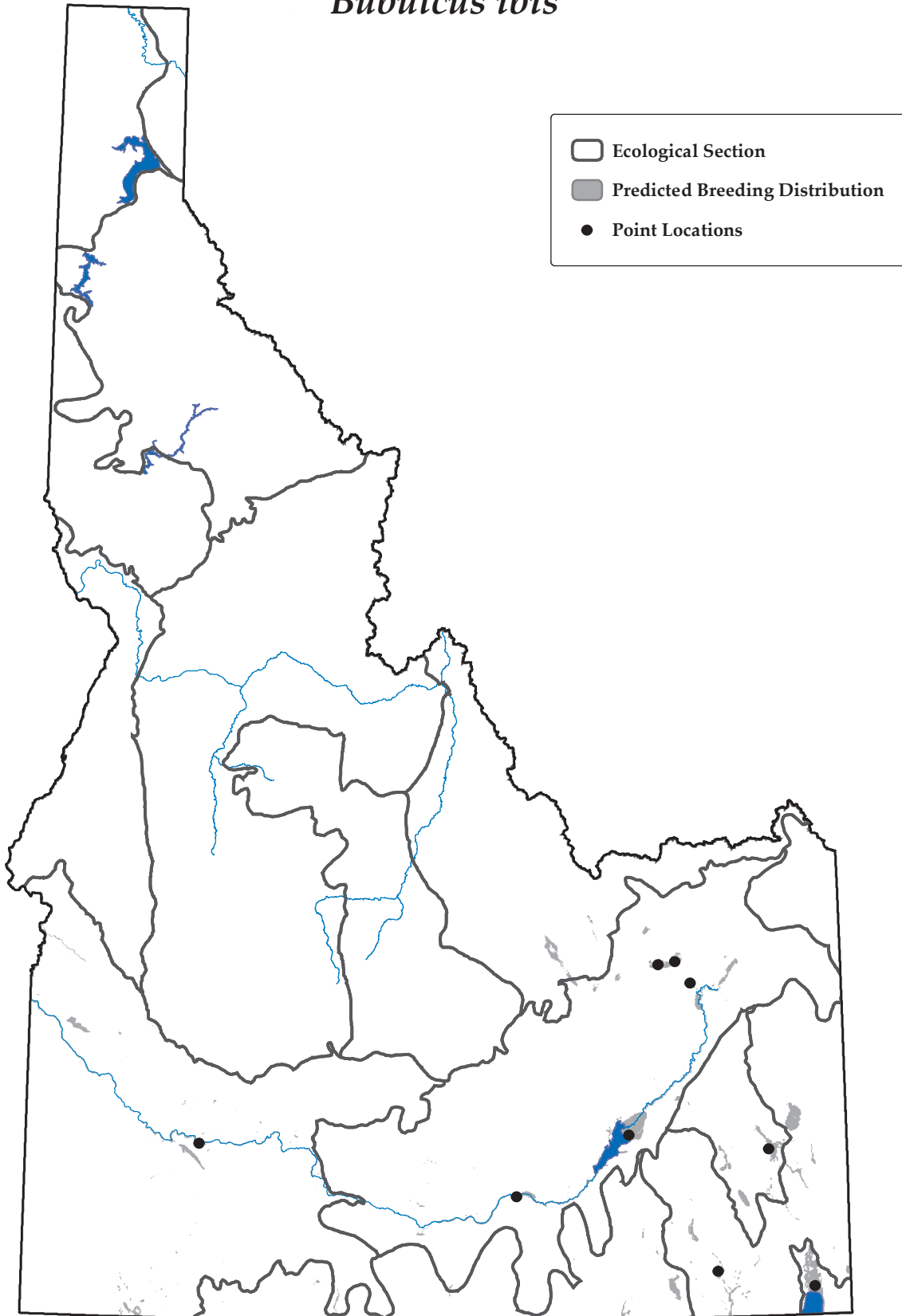
Recent counts of this species have not been conducted in Idaho. Some of the historic nesting locations documented by Trost and Gerstell (1994) likely are not being used by this species currently because of lack of water. Information on how pesticides affect cattle egrets is lacking (Telfair 1994), and may be of particular concern for agricultural areas that are used for foraging by this species and that are frequently sprayed.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

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 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).

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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).

