
Franklin's Gull

Larus pipixcan

Aves — Charadriiformes — Laridae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Apparently secure/Secure (G4/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

Habitat threats and disjunct populations.

TAXONOMY

No taxonomic note of relevance.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The majority of Franklin's gulls breed from east Alberta, east through southwest Manitoba and west Minnesota, south to northeast South Dakota, and west to northcentral Montana. Additional breeding populations are scattered through eastern Idaho, northern Utah, and central Montana. There are an estimated 653,236 adult Franklin's gulls breeding in North America (Kushlan et al. 2002). In the Great Basin and Northern Rocky Mountains, there are approximately 30,819 breeding pairs (Ivey and Herziger 2005). Of these, approximately 8000 pairs breed in eastern Idaho at Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Camas NWR (historically), Grays Lake NWR, Market Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Mud Lake WMA, and Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area (Trost and Gerstell 1994; R. Larrañaga, pers. comm.).

POPULATION TREND

Given the behavioral nature of Franklin's gulls to nest in large colonies in remote areas, and to shift colony locations depending on water conditions, determining population trend is quite difficult and Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend data likely are inappropriate (Burger and Gochfeld 1994, Ivey and Herziger 2005). Nevertheless, BBS data suggest declines in the U.S. during the period 1966–2004 (-1.1% per year) and 1966–1979 (-19.5%; statistically significant), and an increase during the period 1980–2004 (+7.6% per year; Sauer et al. 2005). Colony counts indicate much variability in year-to-year colony sizes, but no indication of overall decline or increase in population size (Burger and Gochfeld 1994). In Idaho, Franklin's gulls appeared to be stable or slightly increasing as of 1993 (Trost and Gerstell 1994).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

As the only gull that nests exclusively in marshes, Franklin's gulls breed in large areas with fairly open emergent vegetation (particularly bulrush/cattail marshes in Idaho) and

deep water (Herziger and Ivey 2003). Nests are formed on floating mats built on the water's surface, on muskrat lodges, or on floating debris, and are constructed of dead marsh plants (Burger and Gochfeld 1994, Trost and Gerstell 1994). This species forages in marshes, irrigated agricultural fields, pastures, and other field habitats (Burger and Gochfeld 1994, Herziger and Ivey 2003), preying on grasshoppers, earthworms, grubs, insects, and seeds and other vegetable matter (Burger and Gochfeld 1994, Trost and Gerstell 1994).

ISSUES

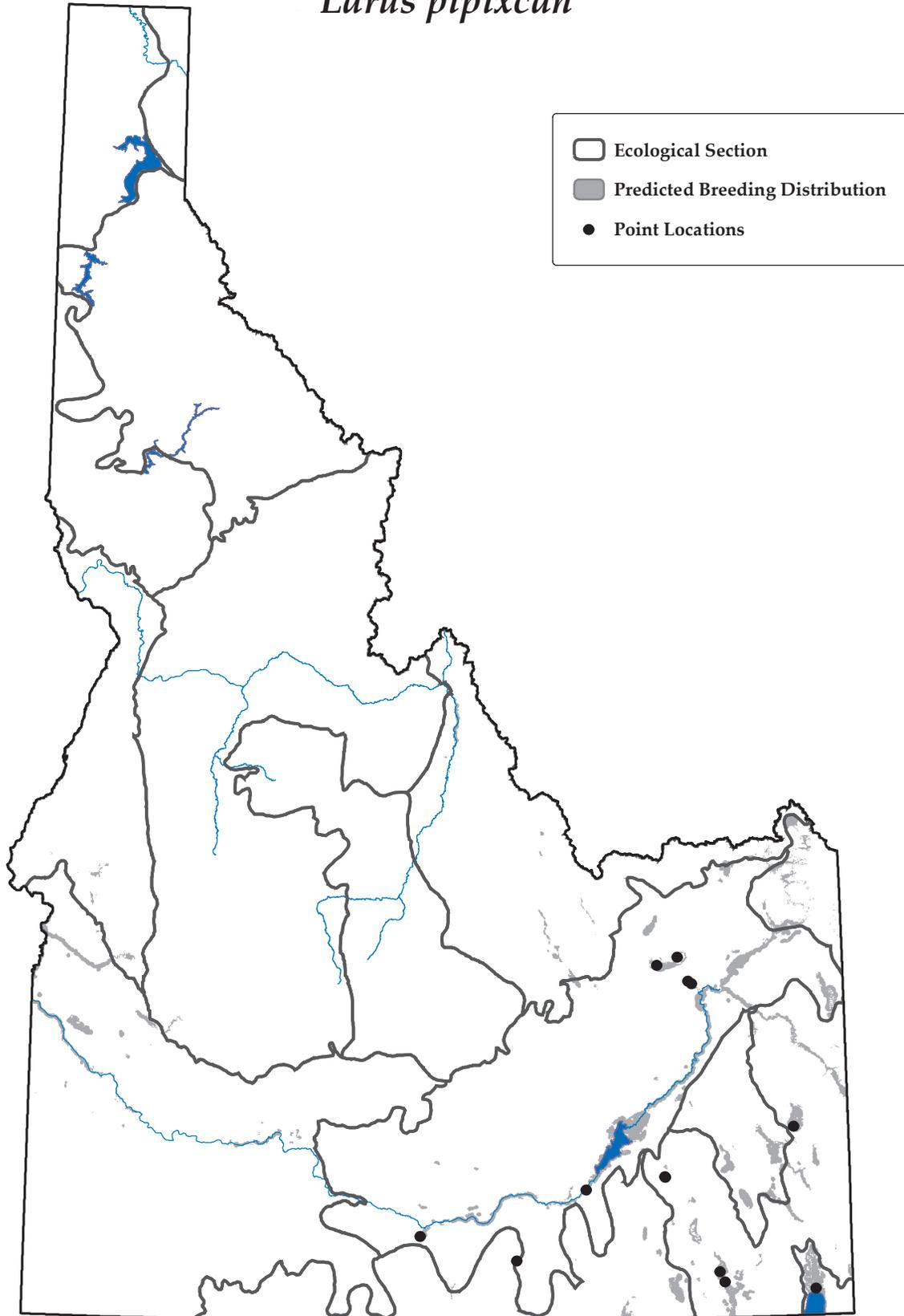
Franklin's gull colonies can be seriously affected by fluctuating water levels, potentially leading to complete abandonment (Burger and Gochfeld 1994). Exotic plant species and overgrowth of marsh plants can create habitat that is too dense for nesting (Burger and Gochfeld 1994, Ivey and Herziger 2005). This species has not nested at Camas NWR in recent years because of drought/low water levels (R. Larrañaga, pers. comm.). In addition, presence of substantial carp populations, such as seen at Bear Lake NWR, appear to be associated with diminished numbers of nesting gull pairs, likely a result of lowered ability to see and capture prey in the muddied waters (Herziger and Ivey 2003). Franklin's gulls are particularly sensitive to human disturbance early in the breeding cycle and again during the chick phase, and will abandon with excessive human exposure (Guay 1968).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Maintaining a suitable water level likely is the most important conservation action (Burger and Gochfeld 1994), followed by maintaining vegetation that is open enough for nest construction (Ivey and Herziger 2005). The Franklin's gull colony at Bear Lake NWR may be responding to increased water levels in a northern section of the refuge (which is carp-free), such that the entire colony appears to have relocated to this section (R. Bundy, pers. comm.). Monitoring of this colony's size and movement should be continued. In addition, consistent monitoring of all 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). Caution should be exercised when entering these colonies, and all research activities should be planned carefully to avoid periods of peak sensitivity, and disturbance should be limited to as much as possible (Burger and Gochfeld 1994, 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).

