
Juniper Titmouse

Baeolophus ridgwayi

Aves — Passeriformes — Paridae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Imperiled (S2)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: No status
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Habitat threats and declining population trends in Idaho.

TAXONOMY

The juniper titmouse was formerly considered conspecific with the oak titmouse (*Baeolophus inornatus*), with the name plain titmouse (*Parus inornatus*). However, due to genetic distinctions and because they differ in voice, morphology, coloration, and ecology, the species complex was reclassified as 2 sibling species in the Genus *Baeolophus* in 1997 (Cicero 1996). No subspecies are recognized, but northern birds are typically larger in body and bill size and grayer in plumage than southern birds (Cicero 1996).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The juniper titmouse is resident in mid-elevation woodlands of the intermountain west and southwestern U.S. and extreme northern Mexico. It ranges from south-central Oregon and northeastern California, south through much of Nevada, northern and eastern Arizona and northeastern Sonora, Mexico and east through most of Utah, southern Idaho, extreme southwest Wyoming, western and southern Colorado, northern and western New Mexico, and extreme west Texas and Oklahoma (Cicero 1996, Biota Information System of New Mexico 2004). Because of the scattered nature of its preferred habitat (juniper and piñon-juniper woodlands – see below), the species occurs in scattered locations throughout this range. The abundance of this species is highest in southern Utah, northern Arizona and central New Mexico and decreases outward from these core areas. In Idaho, the juniper titmouse occurs irregularly in the southwest and is resident in the southeast (Stephens and Sturts 1997). The estimate of population size in Idaho is approximately 2,500 individuals (Rosenberg 2004).

POPULATION TREND

There are no trend estimates for Idaho and there is insufficient data over most of the range of this species for statistically rigorous trend estimates at the state level (Sauer et al. 2005). However, Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data from 1966 to 2004 show significant declines (-3.6% per year) for the piñon-juniper physiographic region (Sauer et al. 2005).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The juniper titmouse typically occupies warm, dry, open juniper and piñon-juniper woodlands (primarily where juniper is dominant), often with large, mature trees capable of providing cavities for nesting (Cicero 2000, Gillihan 2004). The species nests in natural and woodpecker-excavated cavities, although natural cavities appear to be preferred. It also will use artificial nest boxes and may partially excavate cavities in soft or rotten wood (Cicero 2000, Gillihan 2004). Age of first breeding for the juniper titmouse is 1 year and the species usually has only 1 brood per year (Cicero 2000). This species is non-migratory and pairs defend territories year-round. Females are primarily responsible for nest site selection, nest construction, and incubation. Both parents feed nestlings. The juniper titmouse feeds on seeds, fruits and terrestrial invertebrates, with plant materials dominant in fall and winter (Cicero 2000, Gillihan 2004). Where it occurs, piñon nuts appear to be a primary food item for the species. The species is only occasionally observed drinking, therefore available water does not appear to be a habitat requisite (Cicero 2000).

ISSUES

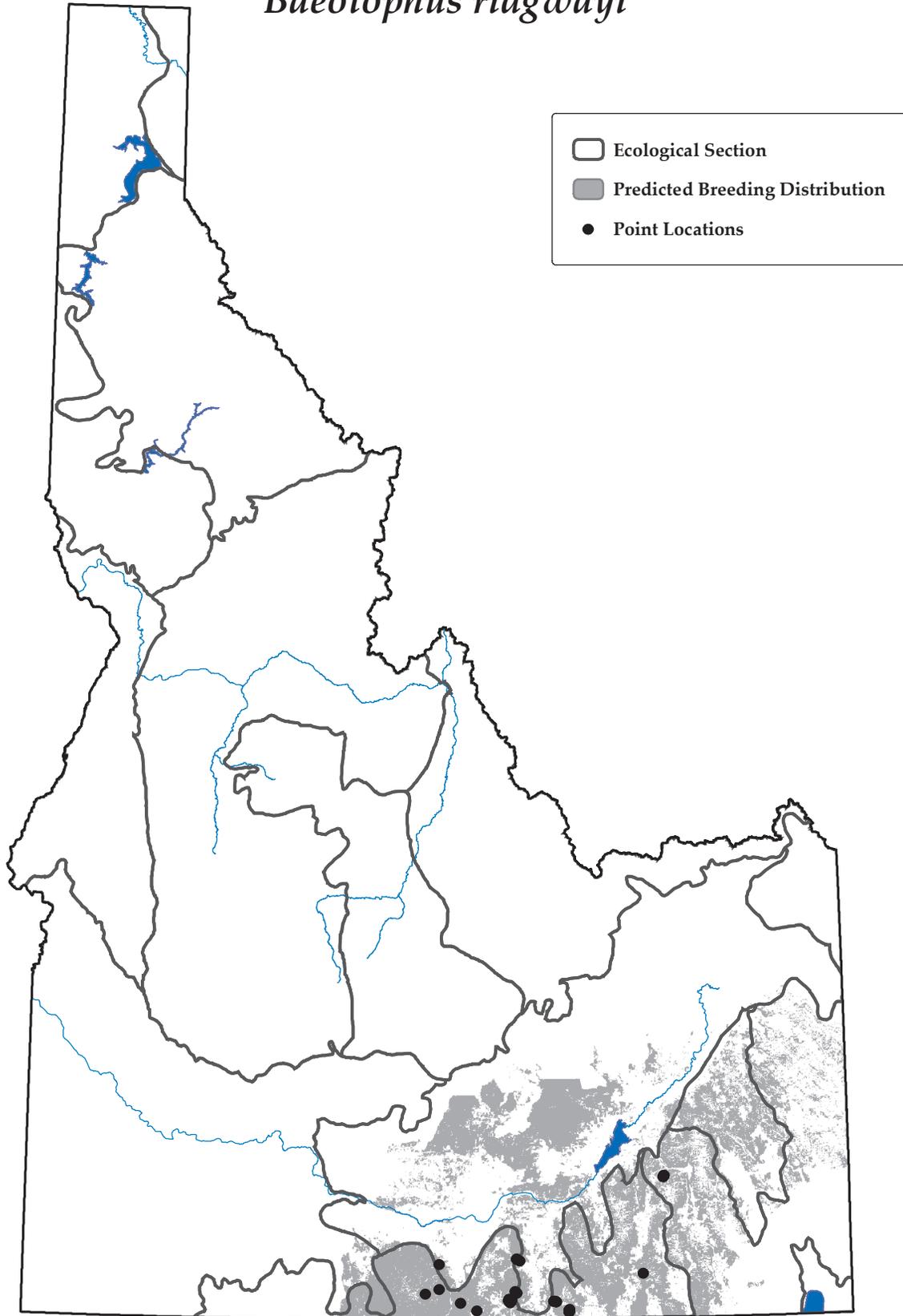
Primary threats to the juniper titmouse include activities or events that eliminate or reduce the extent of, or reduce quality of, juniper and piñon-juniper woodlands or reduce available food sources (Cicero 2000). These include non-selective tree cutting for fuelwood, fence posts, and other uses; rangeland “improvement” projects (including large-scale chaining or non-selective thinning projects); prescribed fire; wildfire (often fueled by non-native, invasive plant species such as cheatgrass); and commercial harvest of piñon nuts. Other threats include competition from non-native cavity nesters including European starling and house sparrow, domestic livestock grazing, and nest parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Selective cutting of juniper and piñon-juniper woodlands may benefit the juniper titmouse if mature trees and large snags are retained (Albert et al. 1994) and if invasive, understory plant species are controlled (Gillihan 2004). Other actions that also may benefit the species include placement of artificial nest boxes, brown-headed cowbird control in areas where cowbird populations are artificially high, and control of European starling and house sparrow where they compete with juniper titmouse pairs for cavities.

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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).

