
Lesser Goldfinch

Carduelis psaltria

Aves — Passeriformes — Fringillidae

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; regional declining population trends.

TAXONOMY

Five subspecies are recognized: *C. p. psaltria* (Colorado and western Oklahoma southward through Mexico to Guerrero, Oaxaca, and central Veracruz); *C. p. hesperophila* (southwestern Washington to southern Baja California eastward to northeastern Utah, central Arizona, and southern Sonora); *C. p. witti* (endemic to the Tres Mariás Islands off the coast of Nayarit, Mexico); *C. p. jouyi* (confined to Yucatán Peninsula and Mujeres Island, Mexico); and *C. p. columbiana* (Chiapas, Mexico, through Central America to northern Venezuela, western Colombia, western Ecuador, and northwestern Peru) (Watt and Willoughby 1999). Records of the lesser goldfinch in Idaho are most likely of the subspecies *C. p. hesperophila*. Most closely related to the American goldfinch (*C. tristis*; year-round resident throughout Idaho) and Lawrence's goldfinch (*C. lawrencei*; extreme southwestern U.S., Baja California, and western Sonora).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The lesser goldfinch is a year-round resident from southwestern Washington, western Oregon, northern California, northern Utah, northern Colorado, northwestern Oklahoma, and central and southern Texas south through Mexico and Central America and into South America from Venezuela and Colombia west and south to western Ecuador and northern Peru (Watt and Willoughby 1999). This species' breeding range extends slightly northward and eastward of its range as a year-round resident (i.e., further northward into Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona, and slightly eastward into Texas and Oklahoma (Watt and Willoughby 1999). Winter range is generally the same as the breeding range, except where it withdraws from more northern latitudes; also winters in areas not occupied during the breeding season, including Tamaulipas and the Pacific coast of Sonora, Mexico, and deserts of southeastern California (Watt and Willoughby 1999). In Idaho, the lesser goldfinch is a rare breeder with a few casual records (Taylor and Trost 1987), and 1 published (Stephens et al. 1990) and a more recent unpublished (Watt and Willoughby 1999) breeding record from Bannock Co. in the southeastern region of the state.

POPULATION TREND

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate negative population trends (although none are statistically significant) across both the western BBS region and the U.S. as a whole. For the period 1966–2004: western region, -0.5% per year; U.S., -0.6%. For the period 1966–1979: western region, -0.9% per year; U.S., -1.3%. For the period 1980–2004: western region, -0.6% per year; U.S., -0.6% (Sauer et al. 2005). There are no BBS trend data for Idaho due to the rarity of this species during the breeding season.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The lesser goldfinch uses a wide variety of habitats throughout its range, including areas where water is available, in partly-open situations with scattered trees, and in woodland edges, second growth, open fields, pastures, and around human habitation (Groves et al. 1997a). Eats mostly seeds, flowers, buds, and fruits (Watt and Willoughby 1999), often foraging on or near the ground. This species may form loose winter flocks of 20–30 birds that also may include American goldfinches (Groves et al. 1997a), especially at backyard feeders.

ISSUES

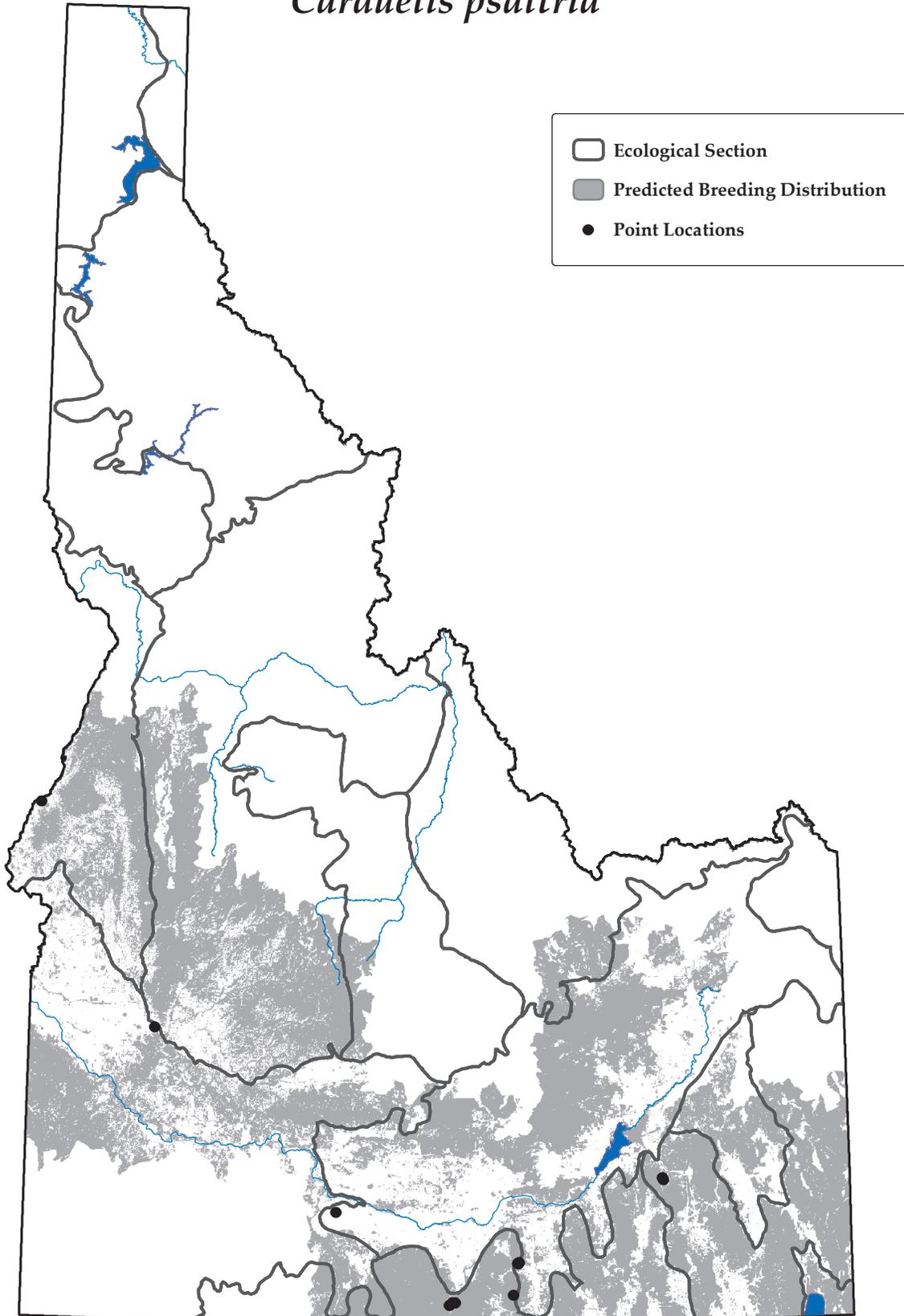
Few apparent issues of concern since the lesser goldfinch likely benefits from the presence of weedy fields, suburban environments, irrigation, planting of introduced trees and shrubs, and increases in the number of backyard bird feeders (Watt and Willoughby 1999). Increased use of herbicides that kill seed-producing weedy plants may therefore be 1 potential threat. Capture for the cage bird trade is thought to be responsible for decreases in populations in Central America (Stiles and Skutch 1989), but this is not an issue in Idaho. Finally, in arid regions of this species' range, such as in southeastern Idaho, the importance of riparian habitat make the lesser goldfinch potentially vulnerable to loss of these areas (Baltosser 1986).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Primary conservation actions should be to gather better documentation of current breeding and wintering status in Idaho. In addition, any efforts to protect and restore riparian habitat throughout the breeding range of the lesser goldfinch will likely benefit this species along with other passerines considered to be riparian associates.

Lesser Goldfinch

Carduelis psaltria



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).

