
Mountain Quail

Oreortyx pictus

Aves — Galliformes — Odontophoridae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide:	Secure (G5)
Statewide:	Critically imperiled (S1)
ESA:	No status
USFS:	Region 1: Sensitive; Region 4: Sensitive
BLM:	Regional/State imperiled (Type 3)
IDFG:	Game bird

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Restricted distribution and low population size in Idaho; substantial disjunct populations in Intermountain West.

TAXONOMY

Although 5 subspecies have been described by the American Ornithologists' Union, they are based on poorly defined plumage characters and are dubious (Gutierrez and Delehanty 1999). Genetic analysis is probably necessary to resolve this issue.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The mountain quail is year-round resident in the mountain ranges of far western North America. Primary range for this species is the Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountains and coastal mountain ranges from Washington state to California. There also are disjunct populations in the intermountain West and Baja California. Mountain quail remain common along and west of the Sierra Nevada and Cascades, but major declines of the populations in the intermountain West have occurred in the last several decades (Gutierrez and Delehanty 1999, Crawford 2000). In Idaho, mountain quail are currently restricted in their range to areas of west-central Idaho, with remnant population strongholds in the Riggins area (Vogel and Reese 2002).

CURRENT POPULATION TREND

Although populations seem stable in much of the West, populations east of the Cascades and Sierras have declined dramatically (Gutierrez and Delehanty 1999). Populations in eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, southwestern Idaho and central Nevada are in jeopardy of extirpation (Vogel and Reese 2002).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Mountain quail breed and winter in shrub-dominated communities. The composition of these communities may vary from manzanita and oak-dominated areas in more coastal habitats to riparian areas of hawthorn, willow, and chokecherry in the intermountain West (Gutierrez and Delehanty 1999). Many mountain quail exhibit elevational movements and move to higher forested habitats during the summer (Herman et al. 2002). Diet is dominated by plant material though invertebrates are very important

during the first 8 weeks. Use of the seed heads and bulbs are important food sources in Idaho (Ormiston 1966). Perennial forbs and mast-producing shrubs also are both important for foraging (Reese et al. 1999). Mountain quail exhibit the highly unusual behavior of both the male and female of a pair incubating clutches simultaneously (Pope and Crawford 2001). Normal clutch is 10–12 eggs and incubation time is 21–22 days. Chicks are highly precocial and grow quickly to half of adult size by 40 days of age. Mountain quail populations have the potential to grow quickly. Efforts to transplant birds from the large western populations into areas in the intermountain West have been successful in some areas (Pope 2002).

ISSUES

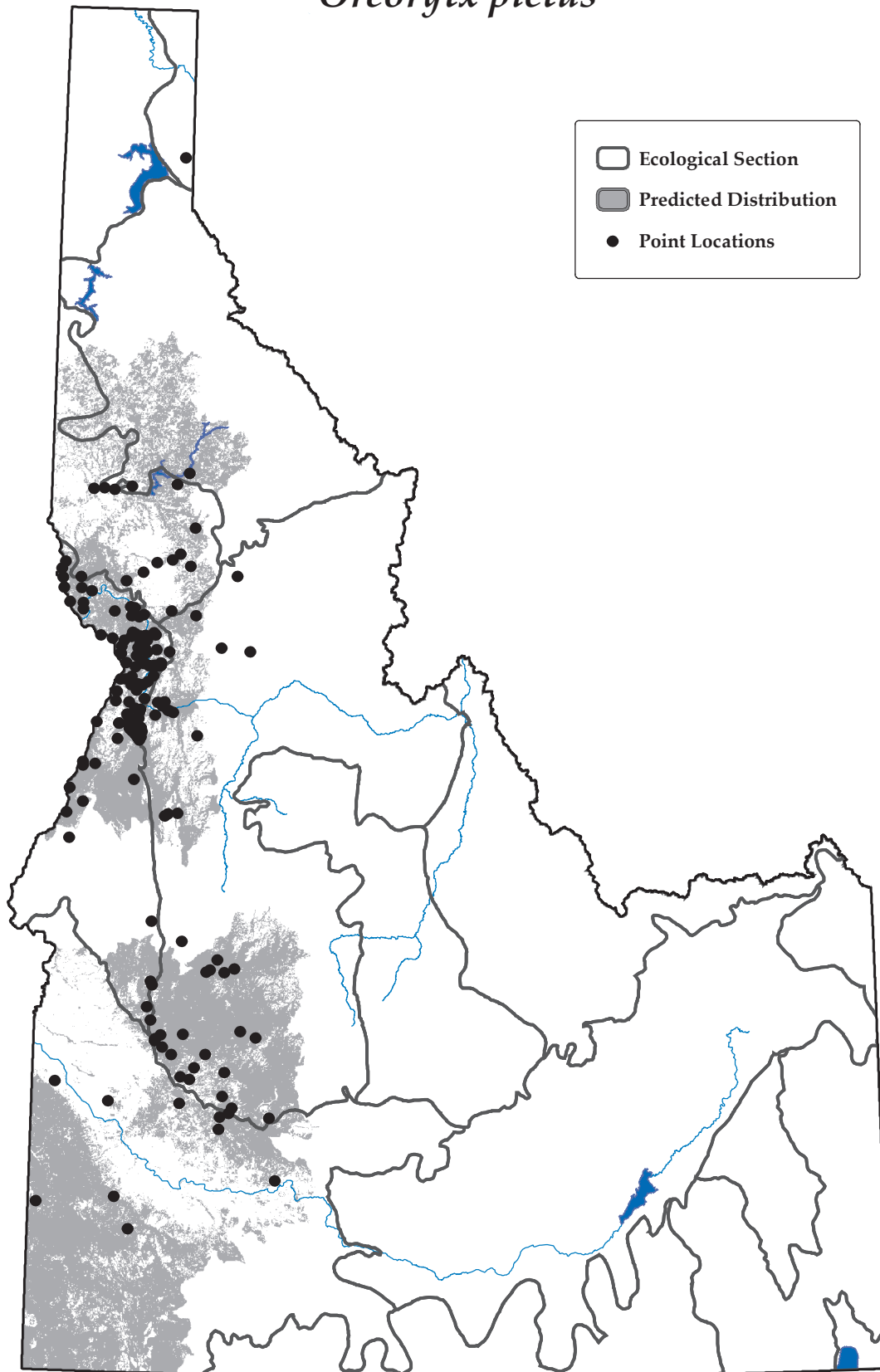
Habitat loss and degradation from forest succession, reservoir construction, fire, weed invasion, and human developments are all important factors in some areas (Gutierrez and Delehanty 1999). Interspecific competition with California quail and chukar introduced around 1950 also is hypothesized to be a factor. The lack of clear mechanisms for the intermountain West population declines is a management problem.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Protect and maintain habitats through better management of riparian and forest habitats. Investigate the mechanisms for recent declines. Use reintroductions to expand range into restored habitats (Sands et al. 1998).

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Map created on September 27, 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).

