
Northern Pintail

Anas acuta

Aves — Anseriformes — Anatidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide:	Secure (G5)
Statewide:	Secure breeding/Imperiled nonbreeding (S5B,S2N)
ESA:	No status
USFS:	Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM:	No status
IDFG:	Game bird

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Degradation of habitat for wintering population in Idaho; regional threats and decreasing long-term trend.

TAXONOMY

Monotypic species with no geographic variation and no subspecies recognized (Austin and Miller 1995).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The northern pintail breeds in western North America on southeastern Victoria Island, southern Southampton Island, and from northern Alaska, northern Yukon, northern Mackenzie, central Keewatin and eastern Manitoba south to central and southwestern California, northern Nevada, central Utah, northern New Mexico, western Kansas, northern Iowa, and western Minnesota (Austin and Miller 1995). This species also breeds in Alaska west to Amchitka Island, in central Arizona, and on southern Vancouver Island, but is absent from western portions of British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and northern California. The key portion of this species' range is western Canada and the Prairie Pothole Region (Bellrose 1980). Less common in the eastern U.S., but does breed locally eastward to Hudson and James Bays. The northern pintail winters along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, throughout the southern U.S. and Mexico, south to Costa Rica and in Bermuda and Cuba (Austin and Miller 1995). In the Pacific Northwest, the largest winter concentrations are found in the Fraser River Delta, Puget Sound, and the Lower Columbia River. In Idaho, this species breeds in the Panhandle and along the Snake River Plain (Stephens and Sturts 1997; Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey [IBIS], unpubl. data); wintering birds are similarly distributed but in greater abundance. The average number of pintail in Idaho detected on mid-winter waterfowl surveys during the 20-year period 1983–2003 is approximately 1800 birds (Hemker 2004a).

POPULATION TREND

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate widespread population declines for the northern pintail, especially in the west. In the western BBS region, numbers have declined at a rate of 4.4% per year during the period 1966–2004, 4.8% per year during

the period 1966–1979, and 3.6% per year during the period 1980–2004 (Sauer et al. 2005). At the level of the U.S. as a whole, although not statistically significant, population declines are reported for each of these same 3 time periods. In Idaho, BBS data also indicate declines over the long-term period 1966–2004 (–4.4% per year, and the more recent short-term period 1980–2004 (–4.6% per year). Breeding population survey data confirm declining population trends suggested by the BBS with current population numbers continent-wide 30–40% below the 1955–2004 average (Wilkins and Otto 2005).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The northern pintail can be found on lakes, rivers, marshes, and ponds in grasslands, barrens, dry tundra, and open boreal forests (Groves et al. 1997a). Also found in cultivated fields, the pintail is 1 of the so-called “puddle” or dabbling ducks, securing its food by tipping up in shallow water (Burleigh 1972). This species typically nests in open country with shallow, seasonal, or intermittent wetlands and low vegetation (Austin and Miller 1995). During both migration and winter, this species inhabits both freshwater and brackish situations. In Idaho, it appears to prefer lowland marshes for feeding and nesting, but may winter (in southern Idaho) on small creeks and reservoirs (Groves et al. 1997a). An early fall migrant, the pintail arrives on wintering areas beginning in August, after wing molt, often forming large roosting and feeding flocks on open, shallow wetlands and flooded agricultural fields (Austin and Miller 1995).

ISSUES

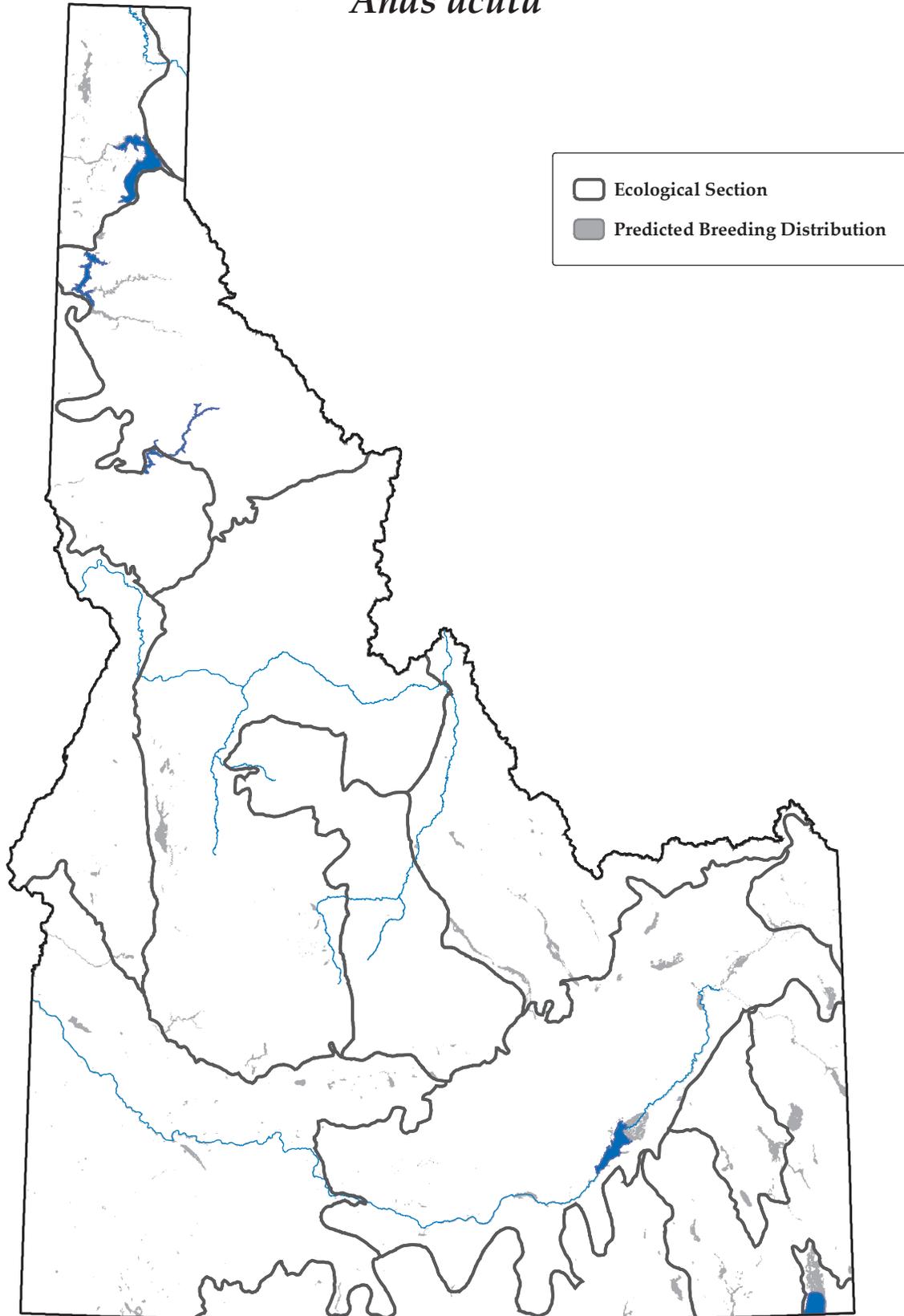
Historically, the northern pintail suffered from lead poisoning from shotgun pellets (1930s–1950s) and from organochlorine contamination (1960s–1970s). These threats have been alleviated in recent times with the conversion to nontoxic shot and bans on a broad range of chemicals, respectively (Austin and Miller 1995). Current issues of concern are more related to habitat degradation, both on breeding and wintering grounds. Drainage of wetlands and agricultural alterations, especially on prairie landscapes in southern Canada and the north-central U.S., are continuing problems (Austin and Miller 1995). In Idaho, wintering populations are of primary concern, especially as ducks on winter wetlands compete against agricultural and urban users for limited water and space as human populations escalate (Austin and Miller 1995).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

With activities coordinated through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP [Anonymous 1986]), primary actions should focus on restoring wetlands and integrating waterfowl management with farming practices (Austin and Miller 1995). Management activities could follow recommendations made by Idaho Partners in Flight (IDPIF 2000) or the Idaho Steering Committee of the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV 2005) for wetland restoration. Better information on causes for population declines in the state, and the west in general, also is needed. Monitoring of wintering pintail population numbers as part of Idaho’s coordinated, statewide all-bird monitoring program (Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey [IBIS]) is recommended.

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Map created on September 19, 2005
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.
Sources: 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).

