
Virginia's Warbler

Vermivora virginiae

Aves — Passeriformes — Parulidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Critically imperiled breeding (S1B)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: Watch list (Type 5)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Restricted distribution and low population size in Idaho.

TAXONOMY

No subspecies recognized. Most closely related to Nashville warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*) with which it constitutes a superspecies (Brush and Johnson 1976).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Breeds in the Great Basin from southeastern Idaho, northeastern Utah, and central Colorado, south to southeastern California, southern Nevada, southeastern Arizona, and central New Mexico (Groves et al. 1997a). Also known to breed locally in extreme southwest and east-central portions of Wyoming. In Idaho, breeds from about Twin Falls Co. northeast to Bingham Co. Winters mainly in the mountains of southwestern Mexico (Olson and Martin 1999). A relatively uncommon species in Idaho with an estimated population size of approximately 400 individuals (Rosenberg 2004). However, the actual number of birds in Idaho is likely considerably higher than this estimate because most Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes, data from which were used to derive the population estimate, typically miss important Virginia's warbler habitat.

POPULATION TREND

The BBS fails to detect a statistically significant population trend for this species for any geographic region during the 1966–2002 period (Sauer et al. 2003). Reasons for this lack of a clear trend could be highly variable counts or too few birds counted (Gilligan 2004).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Virginia's warbler breeds in deciduous woodlands on steep mountain slopes. Also found along mountain streams in sagebrush, or in cottonwood and willow habitat at 1800–2800 m (5905–8662 ft). Typically associated with piñon-juniper and oak woodlands, as well as in mountain mahogany, especially where it occurs in dense thickets throughout mountainous regions of southeastern Idaho (Burleigh 1972). A dense, tall shrub layer is critical for foraging and nesting.

ISSUES

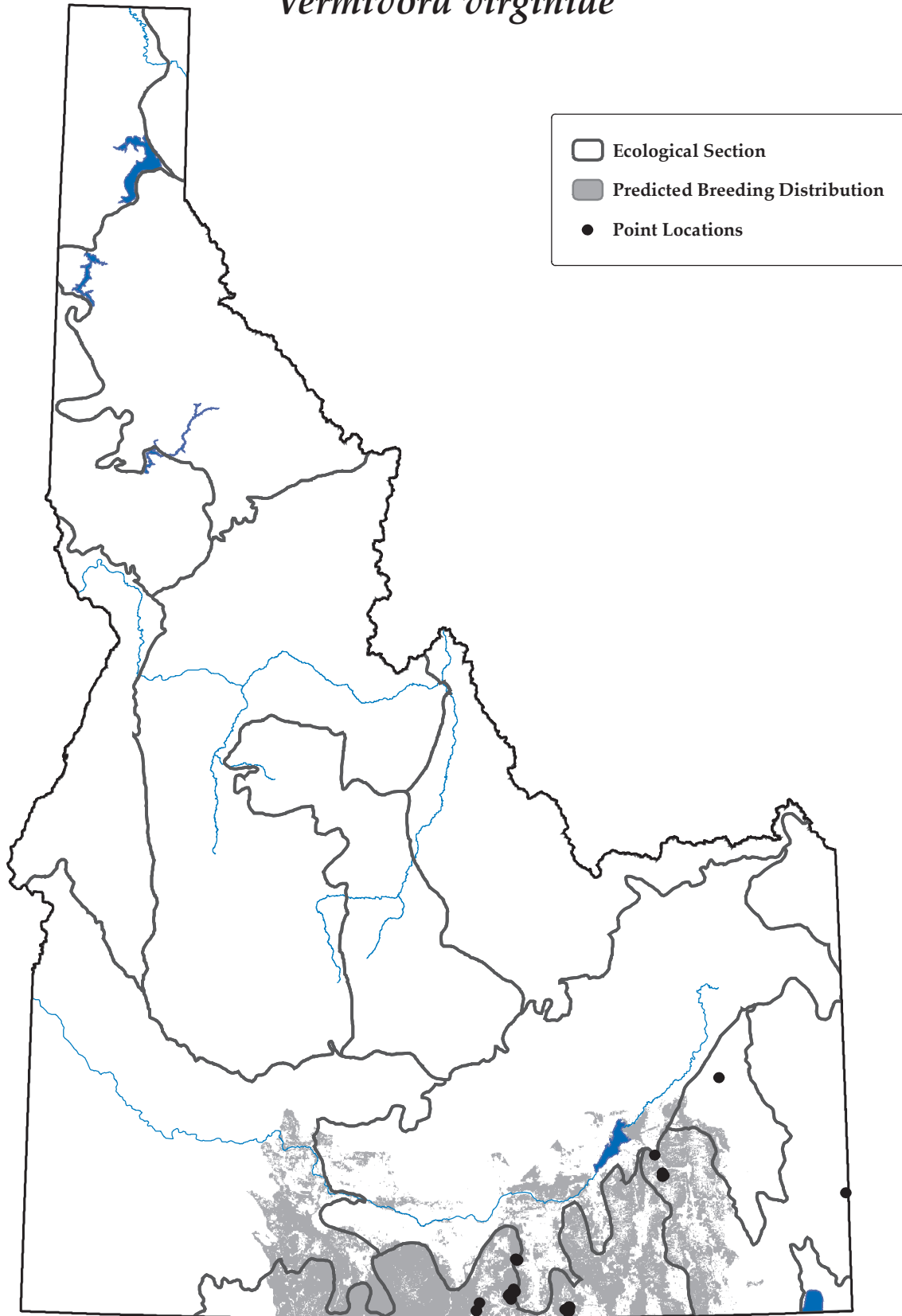
Greatest threat is removal of piñon-juniper woodlands by land managers concerned about encroachment of this habitat into sagebrush communities. Prescribed burns, wildfires, or management actions that remove shrubs will negatively impact this species by removing its nesting cover and principal foraging substrate (Olson and Martin 1999).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The rate of brown-headed cowbird nest parasitism is low for this species, probably due to its preference for relatively high-elevation habitats and its well-hidden nest. However, introducing livestock into the range of this species could result in increases in cowbird nest parasitism. Other negative effects of grazing could include reduction of shrub density or trampling of nests. As a result, livestock grazing should be maintained at levels that preserve shrub cover. Use of pesticides in nesting or foraging areas should also be avoided, especially during the breeding season (Gillihan 2004). Removal of shrub-dominated piñon-juniper woodlands should be practiced judiciously and in incremental phases to avoid widespread eradication of critical nesting habitat for Virginia's warbler.

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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).

