



Conservation Practices for Birds in Nevada

Nevada's lowland rivers are critical to more than 100 species of birds for breeding, nesting, migration, and wintering. Since much of Nevada's lowland river floodplains as well as water flows have been appropriated for agricultural use, these species are dependent on farmers and ranchers managing their lands with conservation in mind.

Nevada Partners in Flight (PIF), a group of state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, and research institutions, has identified bird species in Nevada that are declining. One of the goals identified in the PIF Bird Conservation Plan is to work with Nevada's farmers, ranchers and other private landowners to reverse the decline of these "priority species" by protecting and conserving their critical habitat.

Lowland rivers are those associated with the floodplains of Nevada's major river systems occurring below 5,000 feet elevation in the northern half of the state and below 4,000 feet elevation in the southern half of the state. The major river systems in Nevada include the Humboldt, Truckee, Carson, Walker, Colorado and Virgin rivers. Other major tributaries include Mary's, Reese, Little Humboldt, and Muddy rivers.

Farming and flood irrigation practices contribute to the maintenance of nesting and foraging habitat for wildlife on lowland river floodplains. Private landowners have an important role to play in the conservation of many of Nevada's bird species. Bird conservation objectives and commercial or agricultural objectives can coexist in harmony. Strategies designed to improve overall land condition, such as restoration of vegetation in riparian areas, can have positive impacts on both birds and land productivity. Rotating land uses (such as grass hay harvest and livestock grazing) with resting of pastures and adjusting application times can give nesting birds the time and space necessary to successfully reproduce. Thoughtful and creative approaches to use of open space in urban development design can dually address the open space needs of human and avian residents.

Lowland Riparian

Priority Bird Species

Willow Flycatcher

The willow flycatcher prefers to nest in dense patches of mid-sized shrubs and trees including willow and ash. Often these mid-sized habitats have an overstory of scattered larger trees such as cottonwood and/or willows. Flycatchers forage for insects in their habitat areas as well as meadows and open water. Willow flycatchers arrive on breeding areas as soon as late April and may be present into August.

Recommended Conservation Practices

- ◆ Maintain irrigation of pastures and adjacent riparian patches of shrubs and trees to create saturated soils from April through August.
- ◆ Maintain and enhance riparian patches of shrubs and trees via fencing or other methods.
- ◆ Maintain in-stream flows along rivers or other waterways.
- ◆ Minimize use of insecticides and herbicides wherever possible.

Yellow-Billed Cuckoo

Yellow-billed cuckoos prefer large gallery cottonwood and willow forests for foraging and nesting. Most of the cuckoo habitat in Nevada occurs in low-lying river forest below 4,500 feet elevation.

Cuckoos arrive on summer breeding areas in mid-June or July and depart Nevada by late August or mid-September. Cuckoos feed on a variety of insects, including caterpillars, grasshoppers, and cicadas.



Recommended Conservation Practices

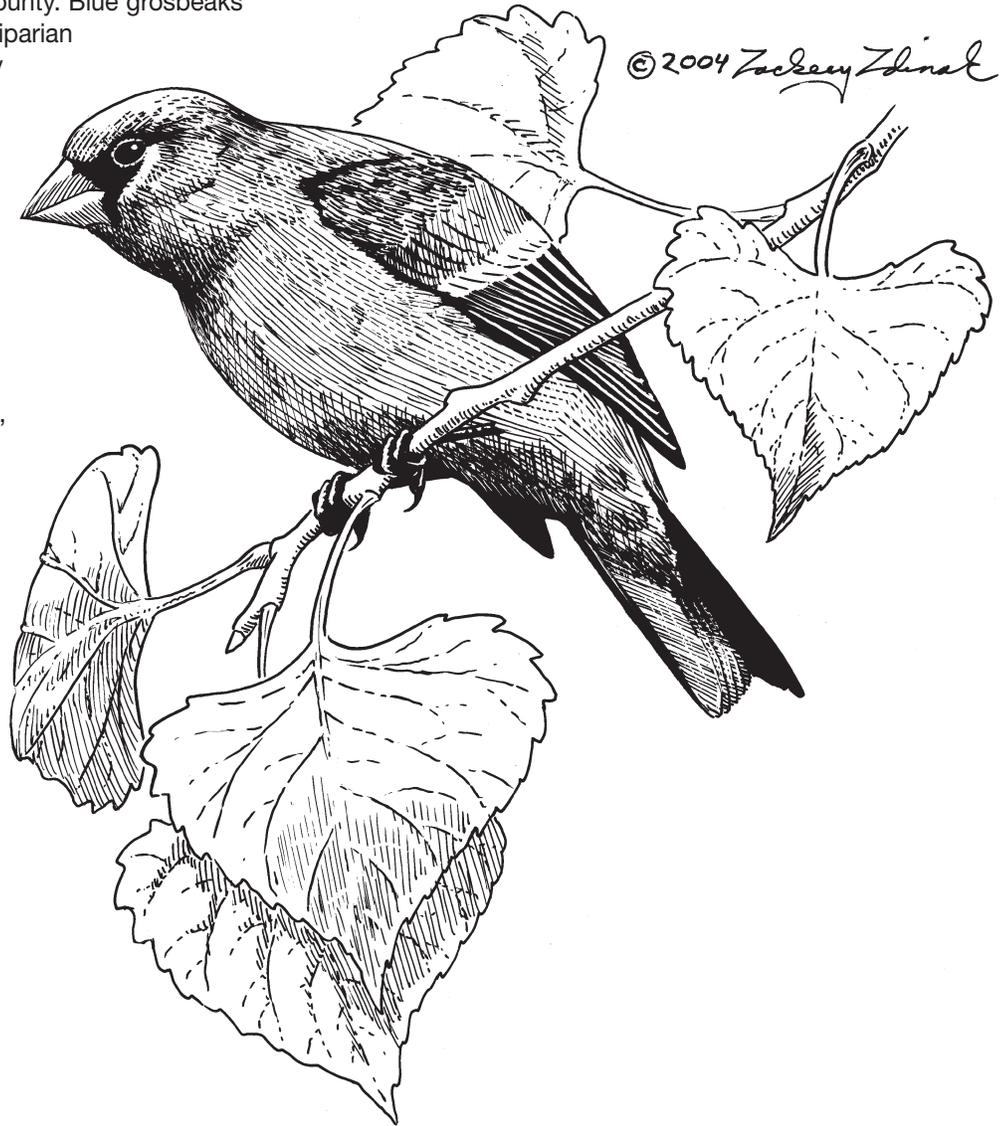
- ◆ Encourage water management agencies to establish water flow regimes that encourage recruitment of willow and cottonwood.
- ◆ Use fencing or other methods to maintain and enhance riparian areas with shrubs and trees.
- ◆ Maintain in-stream flows along rivers or other waterways.
- ◆ Refrain from use of insecticides and herbicides in river floodplains where yellow-billed cuckoos summer, and minimize the use of insecticides in river floodplains wherever possible.

Blue Grosbeak

In Nevada, blue grosbeaks are summer residents from the Colorado River north to Mason Valley in Lyon County, with isolated distribution into the Lower Truckee River and the Humboldt River below Winnemucca, and Meadow Valley Wash in Lincoln County. Blue grosbeaks prefer dense to moderately dense riparian tree canopy and shrub cover. They forage in weedy fields and brushy areas, and their diet consists of insects, seeds, and occasionally, fruit. Their nests are frequently subject to parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds.

Recommended Conservation Practices

- ◆ Maintain thriving riparian shrub stands (buffaloberry in the north, mesquite and others in the south) mixed with cottonwood and/or willow stands.
- ◆ Maintain in-stream flows along rivers and waterways.



Where to Get Assistance and More Information

This fact sheet covers some of the basic considerations and conservation practices that will benefit priority bird species relying on lowland riparian areas for their survival, as identified in the Nevada Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan (PIF BCP). We recommend you seek the advice of a biologist, conservationist, or resource planner to help you meet your objectives. The Nevada Department of Wildlife, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or your local conservation district can provide this assistance. All of these offices have received a copy of the plan, which contains more detailed information on how you can help these birds remain a part of your community.

Sources of Cost-share Assistance for Wildlife Habitat Improvement

Nevada Department of Wildlife
Landowner Incentive Program

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP)
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
Landowner Incentive Program through the Conservation Districts

US Fish and Wildlife Service
Partners for Wildlife
Intermountain West Joint Venture

Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF)
Stewardship Incentive Program