



Conservation Practices for Birds in Nevada

Nevada's mesquite and catclaw habitats are important for a considerable number of birds for breeding, nesting, migration activity, and wintering. While much of the mesquite habitat in southern Nevada occurs on private land and catclaw habitat occurs primarily on public land, urban development pressures and the corresponding conversion of public lands to private development in the region affects the well being of both habitat types. In addition, the practice of gravel extraction from the washes of the region for road construction has particularly targeted the catclaw habitat for negative impacts.

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.

Mesquite is found in isolated patches throughout Clark County and southern Lincoln and Nye counties. Mesquite habitat is found along washes and riparian areas and at the edges of dry lake beds where soils are deep and water is somewhat close to the surface. Catclaw is known for its cat-like thorns that often grab at passersby, and is generally distributed along the wash systems throughout southern Nevada. Both habitat types can be infected with mistletoe, which greatly enhances their value to fruit-eating birds.

Private landowners often own parcels of land that have patches of mesquite and, to a lesser extent, catclaw. Even small patches of mesquite can add great value to a parcel's wildlife habitat. Often landowners can maintain the value of these habitats by merely leaving the habitat in its current condition or minimizing any cutting of mesquite for firewood. Developers can minimize project impacts by maintaining mesquite habitat on their open-space parcels and designing linkage corridors of natural habitat parcels through the development to minimize habitat fragmentation. Landowners with catclaw habitats on their properties should be aware that gravel extraction in wash bottoms is particularly destructive to catclaw corridors.

When possible, gravel extraction should occur outside the catclaw corridors. Where catclaw corridors must be removed, efforts should be taken to restore abandoned pits through re-contouring and plant re-establishment.

Large stands of mesquite once existed across the Las Vegas Valley and other areas of southern Nevada. A considerable amount of this habitat has been lost as a consequence of land development, and it is important to maintain remaining habitats. Plantings of native honey, screwbean mesquite trees, catclaw, and acacia shrubs may be necessary. These are often available in local nurseries and can be planted under cost-share programs and guidelines such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service handbook, *Conservation Plantings for Natural Resources Management*.

Priority Bird Species

Phainopepla

The phainopepla is a fruit-eating bird with a range throughout southwestern deserts including southern Nevada. The phainopepla prefers to eat mistletoe berries, often associated with mesquite and catclaw habitats. Phainopeplas arrive on their breeding grounds in October and occur in flocks until the initiation of the breeding season in February or March. The breeding season typically lasts until the end of April or beginning of May.



Recommended Conservation Practices

- ◆ Maintain stands of mesquite by limiting cutting and trimming of trees and associated mistletoe particularly during the breeding season.
- ◆ Minimize or eliminate burning of mesquite.
- ◆ Limit grazing treatments in mesquite habitats to sustainable applications.
- ◆ Encourage landowners to plant mesquite, catclaw and other desert riparian plants.
- ◆ Minimize use of insecticides and herbicides wherever possible.
- ◆ Locate gravel operations outside of catclaw washes.

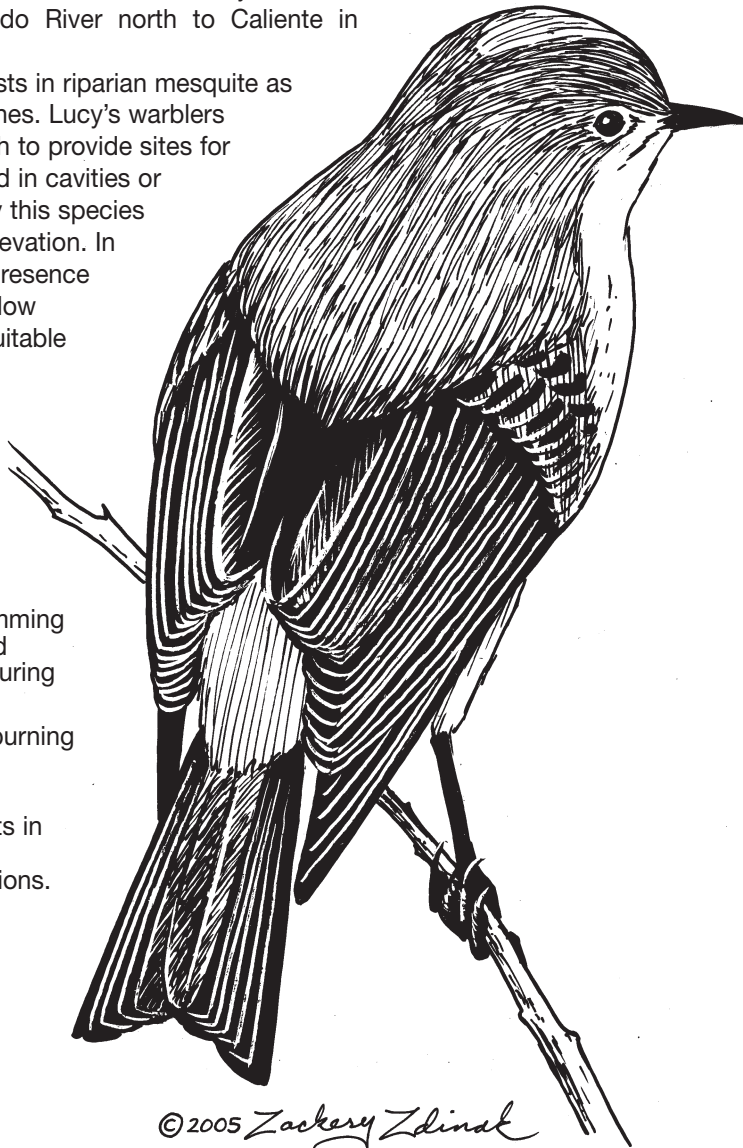
Lucy's Warbler

Lucy's warblers range throughout the southwestern states as far to the east as western Texas and into northwestern Mexico. In southern Nevada, the Lucy's warbler ranges from the Colorado River north to Caliente in Lincoln County.

The Lucy's warbler nests in riparian mesquite as well as along desert washes. Lucy's warblers require trees large enough to provide sites for nesting. Nests are located in cavities or under loose bark. Usually this species nests below 3,300 feet elevation. In the arid Southwest, the presence of water or relatively shallow groundwater facilitates suitable breeding habitat.

Recommended Conservation Practices

- ◆ Maintain older-aged stands of mesquite by limiting cutting and trimming of trees and associated mistletoe particularly during the breeding season.
- ◆ Minimize or eliminate burning of old aged stands of mesquite.
- ◆ Limit grazing treatments in mesquite habitats to sustainable applications.
- ◆ Minimize use of insecticides and herbicides wherever possible.



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 mesquite-catclaw habitats 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