



# Conservation Practices for Birds in Nevada

Nevada's Mojave Desert, typified by the creosote bush shrub community, is home to a unique community of resilient bird species admirably adapted to survive in this often harsh, unforgiving environment. There was a time when the Mojave shrub type was hardly a concern of the private landowner, but the recent explosion of urban growth in the region and the extensive conversion of public lands to private ownership has made conservation of the Mojave shrub habitat critical.

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.

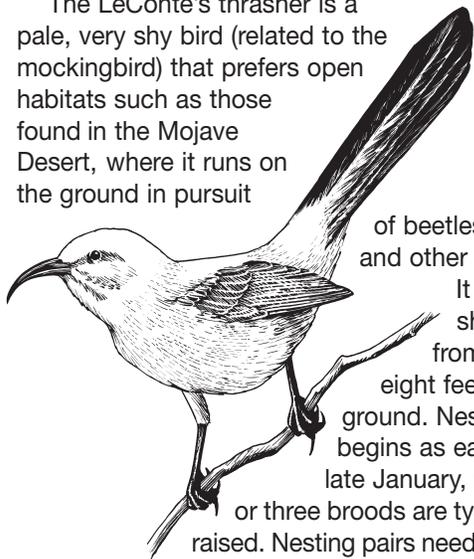
Since 1989, vast tracts of land in the Mojave Desert have been conserved primarily due to the federal listing of the desert tortoise. This has resulted in significant protection of Mojave bird species. The private landowner or developer has opportunities to contribute to the conservation effort within urbanized lands by providing a connection between those protected tracts through creative design and management of open space lands within developments. The greatest impact of land development on the Mojave shrub type has been the direct bulldozing and removal of the native vegetation itself. While in many instances this practice is unavoidable, opportunities do exist to maintain native vegetation within developed lands. Even small patches of desert shrub habitats can have value for wildlife, but significantly more value is realized when small tracts of native vegetation are linked together to provide corridors of bird movement through a development. Preserving larger tracts of habitat provides the necessary space for more breeding pairs.

## Mojave Shrub

### Priority Bird Species

#### Leconte's Thrasher

The LeConte's thrasher is a pale, very shy bird (related to the mockingbird) that prefers open habitats such as those found in the Mojave Desert, where it runs on the ground in pursuit



of beetles, ants, and other insects.

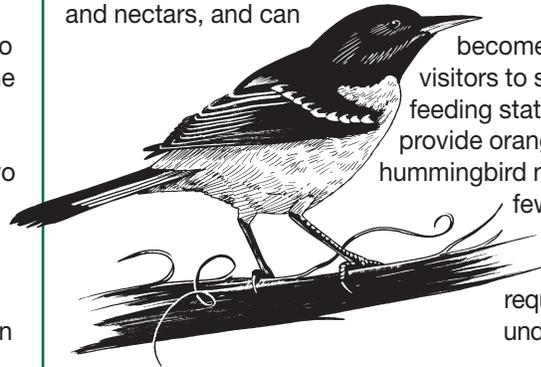
It nests in shrubs from two to eight feet off the ground. Nesting begins as early as late January, and two or three broods are typically raised. Nesting pairs need about fifteen acres of suitable habitat to maintain a territory, and have demonstrated a characteristic shyness and intolerance of human disruption.

#### Recommended Conservation Practices

- ◆ Design open-space components of developments to connect sizeable tracts of native desert habitat by maintaining corridors of native vegetation through developments.

#### Scott's Oriole

In Nevada, the Scott's oriole largely follows the distribution of the Joshua tree throughout its range in the Mojave Desert. It is a beautiful black and yellow bird with a rich song of whistled phrases. Nesting pairs can use a wide range of vegetative structures, from the open Joshua tree forests of the uplands to denser riparian habitats found within the uplands. Scott's orioles frequently nest in Joshua trees when they are present, but will nest in other trees in otherwise suitable habitat. They eat insects, fruits, and nectars, and can



become frequent visitors to summer feeding stations that provide orange halves and hummingbird nectar. Very

few aspects of the bird's space requirements are understood.

#### Recommended Conservation Practices

- ◆ Maintain Joshua trees and tracts of associated habitat within and adjacent to developments.

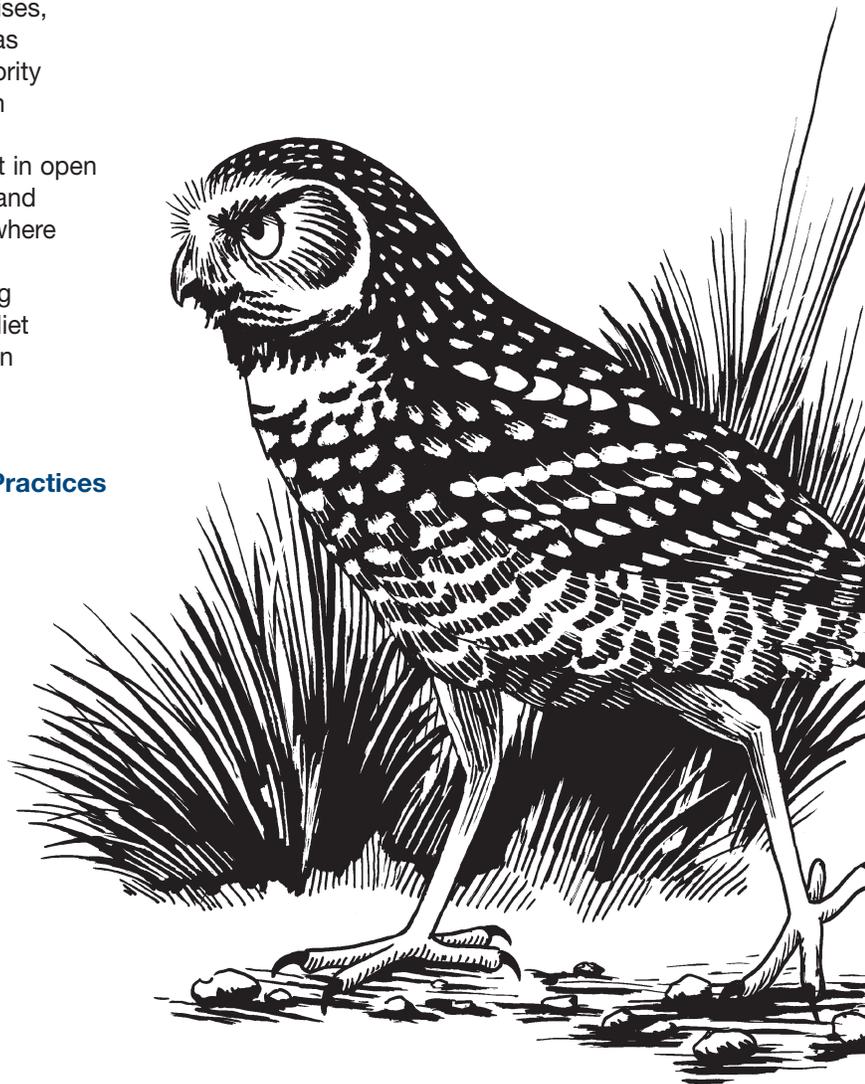
## Burrowing Owl

In southern Nevada, the burrowing owl is found primarily in the valley bottoms and washes. Burrowing animals such as squirrels, kit foxes, desert tortoises, and badgers also prefer these areas and their burrows provide the majority of owl nesting sites that have been found in Nevada.

These adaptable birds may nest in open urban areas such as golf courses and industrial areas with open spaces where burrows are available. Burrows exist in a variety of forms, including exposed pipes and culverts. The diet of burrowing owls is varied and can include large insects, reptiles, amphibians, and rodents.

### Recommended Conservation Practices

- ◆ Preserve habitats in open spaces greater than five acres within and adjacent to developments, and minimize human-related impacts.
- ◆ Where available burrows are limited, construct artificial nest burrows using plans available from NDOW.



### 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 the Mojave shrub habitat 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 Incentives 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