

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

Conservation Profile



Photo by Larry Neel

Priority Status	Conservation Target
Reasons for Priority Status	Threats Small population size
Other Rankings	Continental PIF: None Audubon Watchlist: None Natural Heritage: S4B USFWS: Migratory Bird BLM: None NDOW: Conservation Priority IM West Waterbird: High Concern
Trends	Historical: Major declines due to human harvest, followed by increases/expansions in some regions [p1] Recent: Declining [IWWCP]
Population Size Estimates	Nevada: 600 [IWWCP], with substantial annual variation Global: 143,000 [NAWCP] Percent of Global: < 1 %
Population Objective	Maintain average breeding population of 600 birds
Monitoring Coverage	Source: NDOW aerial surveys, refuge and WMA surveys, Aquatic Bird Count Coverage and Adequacy: Good – Fair depending on area
Key Conservation Areas	Humboldt, Carson, Truckee, and Walker River systems in northern Nevada Virgin and Muddy River systems in southern Nevada Lahontan Valley Ruby Valley

Habitat Use Profile

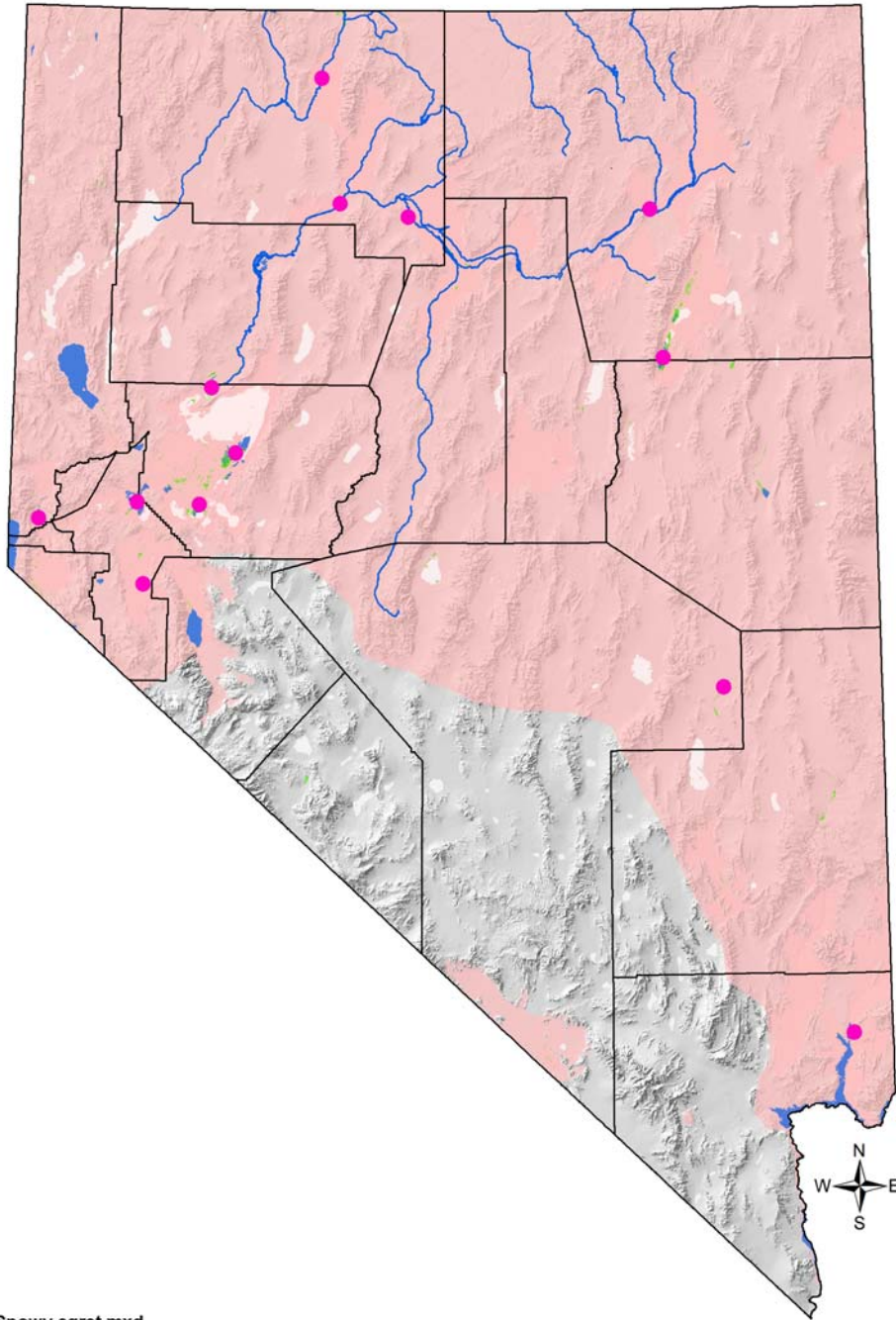
Main Habitats Used in Nevada	Marsh Open Water Great Basin and Mojave Desert Lowland Riparian
Key Habitat Use Parameters	Forages along shorelines of rivers, lakes, marshes, wetlands, and agricultural ponds Nest in riparian woodlands in trees (cottonwoods, willows, Russian olive), or in emergent marsh vegetation [p1] May commute several km from colony sites to foraging areas [p1] Often roosts colonially [p1]
Minimum Patch Size	Use large range of marsh sizes for foraging [EO]

Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	Spring - summer (breeding)
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	April – early June [s4, p1]
Nesting Habits	Build stick nests in riparian trees or emergent marsh vegetation [p1] Nest in single- or mixed-species colonies [p1] Fidelity to colony sites high; may re-use old nests [p1]
Food Requirements	Wide range of fish and crustaceans, along with other invertebrates and small reptiles / amphibians [p1] Hunts in shallow water (< 20 cm) near shoreline [p1]

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File: Snowy egret.mxd

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Temporary Map Key

Pink: Breeding range

Hot pink / magenta: For some birds, breeding data was limited, and was supplemented by extrapolation to include likely breeding range. In these cases, hot pink represents known breeding range, and lighter pink the extrapolated breeding range.

Blue: Winter range

Yellow: Important migration stopover areas

Purple: Year-round range

Green: In some maps, wetlands mapped by SWReGAP are shown in green for interpretational purposes

Dot symbols: In cases where breeding records were isolated or very restricted in extent, they are represented by a pink dot symbol rather than a shaded area.

Arrows: Major migration routes. These are shown only for birds for which there are migration-associated conservation issues.

OVERVIEW

Snowy Egrets have a complex pattern of population trends in the greater region of the American west, and it is not clear how Nevada fits into these broader patterns. After serious historical declines related to feather harvesting for millinery, the species resurged in many areas, only to suffer new setbacks beginning in the late 20th century [p1]. Information about recent trends is somewhat contradictory for our region [p1 vs. p10], though the IWWCP finding of significant declines is probably the most reliable. Recent threats to Snowy Egrets appear to consist primarily of generalized habitat threats rather than species-specific issues. However, in light of likely ongoing declines, additional effort should be devoted to studying the specific habitat needs for this colonially-breeding bird.

ABUNDANCE AND OCCUPANCY BY HABITAT

- High counts 1,000 in Lahontan Valley in 2004 [NDOW]

NEVADA-SPECIFIC STUDIES AND ANALYSES

- TBD

MAIN THREATS AND CHALLENGES

- Loss of suitable breeding habitat (riparian tree groves of sufficient size)
- Loss or dewatering of suitable marshes for foraging
- Mercury may be a concern in the Carson River system [p3]

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CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

Habitat Strategies

- General Marsh and Lowland Riparian conservation strategies

Research, Planning, and Monitoring

- Conduct additional research to better determine the parameters of suitable colony nesting and foraging habitat in Nevada
- Consider species needs in lowland riparian restoration planning

OTHER PRIORITY SPECIES WITH SIMILAR CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

- Least Bittern

FURTHER READING

- Hill et al 2008
- TBD by literature review

Temporary codes for standard references

[p1] Birds of N. America account for this species
[p2] NV Bird Conservation Plan ver. 1 (Neel 1999)
[p3] NV Wildlife Action Plan
[p4] Nevada Breeding Bird Atlas
[p5] PIF N. American Landbird Conservation Plan (Rich et al 2004) (NOTE:
[p6] Intermountain West Regional Shorebird Plan (Oring et al 2003)
[p7] Pacific Flyway reports
[p8] Shrubsteppe Landscapes in Jeopardy (Dobkin and Sauder 2004)
[p9] Birds in a Sagebrush Sea (Paige and Ritter 1999)
[s1] NBC-based population size estimates
[s2, s3] NBC-based habitat relationship analysis
[s4] Breeding Bird Atlas breeding phenology data
[i1] BBS trends analysis (Sauer et al 2005)
[i2] NV Upland Game Management Plan (Espinosa et al in prep.)
[i3] Western Quail Management Plan (Zornes et al 2008)
[i4] NDOW Shorebird and Waterbird monitoring data (Neel)
[i5] Brad Andres IMJV Shorebird / Waterbird data set
[i6] GBBO Technical Report 08-01 (2008)
[EO] Expert opinion from NVPIF group members
[IWWCP] Intermountain West Waterbird Conservation Plan
[NAWCP] North American Waterbird Conservation Plan
[LBCUSACP] Long-billed Curlew Status Assessment and Conservation Plan
[USSCP] U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan
[WHSRN] Western Hemispheric Shorebird Regional Network