

Red-necked Phalarope

Phalaropus lobatus



Photo by Larry Neel

Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Open Water Ephemeral Wetland and Playa (Marsh)	
Key Habitat Parameters ◐	
Plant Density	Low density of emergent plants ⁶
Mosaic	Variety of lakes, ponds, and marshes dominated by open water; no other habitat features known to be important ⁶
Water Depth	Not quantified, but occurs on water bodies of varying sizes and depths ⁶
Water Quality	Tolerates variety of salinities, but often associated with saline or hypersaline wetlands ⁶ . ^{EO}
Response to Vegetation Removal	Neutral ^{EO}
Area Requirements ◐	
Minimum Patch Size	Unknown; small wetlands used ⁶
Recommended Patch Size	> 50 ha [125 ac] ^{EO}
Home Range / Territory Size	Unknown

Conservation Profile

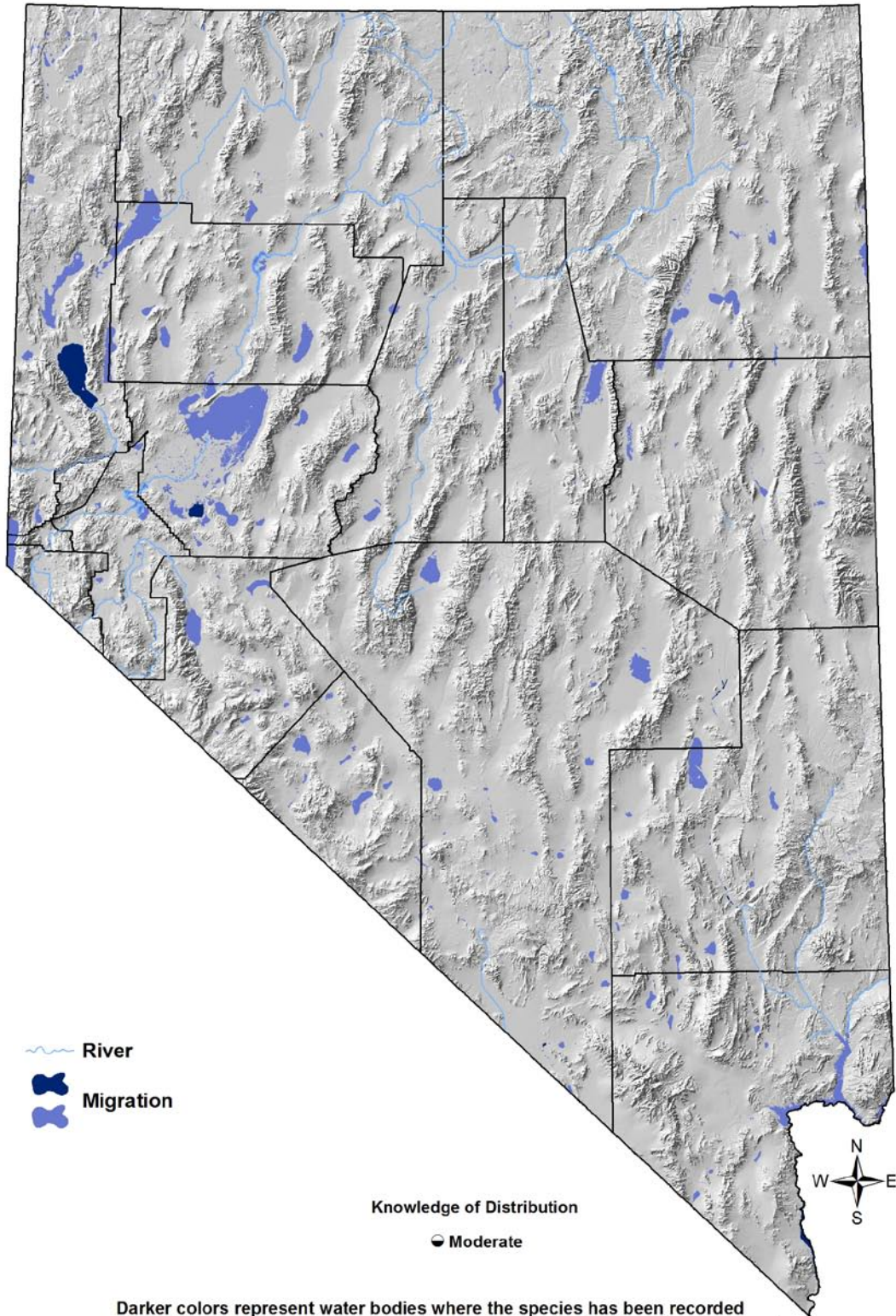
Priority Status	
Conservation Priority Species	
Species Concerns	
High stewardship responsibility (staging and migration) Historical and possible recent declines Habitat threats	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	None
Audubon Watchlist	None
NV Natural Heritage	S4M
USFWS	Migratory Bird
BLM	None
USFS	None
NDOW	Conservation Priority
IW Shorebird Plan	Very Important
Trends	
Historical ◐	Significant declines ⁶
Recent ◐	Possible declines ^{2, 6}
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada ◐	~3,000 (staging and migration), with high annual variability ³
Global ◐	2,500,000 ^{1, 4}
Percent of Global	< 1%
Population Objective	
Maintain / Increase ^{EO}	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	NDOW shorebird counts, NWR and WMA counts, Aquatic Bird Count
Coverage in NV	Good in Lahontan Valley, NWR's, and WMA's; Fair / Poor elsewhere
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	Lahontan Valley (esp. Big Soda Lake), Humboldt Sink, Walker Lake
Restoration	Degraded or at-risk marshes, lakes, and ponds

Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Fall (migration, late July - early August peak, variable) Spring (migration, April - May peak, variable)	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
N/A	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	N/A
Site Fidelity	Unknown
Food Habits	
Basic	Dabbler
Primary Diet	Small aquatic invertebrates ⁶
Secondary Diet	Some flying insects ⁶

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Darker colors represent water bodies where the species has been recorded within the past 12 years. Lighter colors represent water bodies where the species could potentially occur. Smaller water bodies may be difficult to visualize on the map.

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Overview

Although taxonomically a shorebird, Red-necked Phalaropes spend most of their lives at sea. Significant numbers of these long-distance migrants, however, stage or stop over in Nevada during migration, particularly in Lahontan Valley. Numbers vary greatly from year to year, but when ideal conditions are present, the number of phalaropes may be many times greater than in a typical year. For instance, in the late 1980's, approximately 30,000 birds were estimated to be present in Big Soda Lake (Lahontan Valley Wetlands) alone (L. Neel, *pers. comm.*). Even larger congregations are typical of nearby areas such as Great Salt Lake and Mono Lake.⁶

Fall migrants consistently outnumber spring migrants in Nevada and surrounding areas by wide margin.⁷ That said, however, phalarope numbers are difficult to assess accurately during migration, as migration peaks are short, and their timing is variable. Additionally, fall migration generally occurs earlier (late July) than for most other shorebirds (L. Neel, *pers. comm.*), and is therefore not always effectively captured by multi-species migration counts. For these reasons, population size estimates for Nevada need to be confirmed with further research and monitoring.

The Red-necked Phalarope is a Conservation Priority Species in part because Nevada (particularly Lahontan Valley) provides migration stopover habitat for several thousand birds each year. In recognition of their critical importance to Red-Necked Phalaropes and other shorebirds,^{4, 7} the Lahontan Valley Wetlands have been designated as a "Site of Hemispheric Importance" by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (www.whsrn.org).

Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat

Although about 3,000 Red-necked Phalaropes are estimated to stopover in Nevada, on average, numbers vary substantially from "wet" years to "dry" years. Peak counts of 16,200 have been observed in Lahontan Valley as recently as 1987,¹ and 30,000 in the late 1980s (L. Neel, *pers. comm.*).

Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses

Shuford et al. (2002)⁷ provides the most comprehensive data for migratory shorebirds in the Intermountain West region, including Nevada.

Main Threats and Challenges

Habitat Threats

- Loss or degradation of marshes, ponds, and lakes due to water diversions, declines in water quality, or development

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Research, Planning, and Monitoring Challenges

- The relative importance of ephemeral wetlands such as flooded playas, particularly during spring migration, has not been well-studied and deserves further investigation⁵

Conservation Strategies

Habitat Strategies

- Open Water (p. Hab-15-1) and Ephemeral Wetland and Playa (p. Hab-6-1) habitat conservation strategies benefit this species
- Maintain conditions that produce healthy populations of aquatic invertebrates (brine shrimp, brine flies, and others) during the spring and fall migration periods

Research, Planning, and Monitoring Strategies

- Improve current monitoring programs to better count peak migration numbers
- Devote more inventory and monitoring effort to ephemeral wetlands to determine their relative importance as migration habitat
- Monitor water quality in occupied sites

Public Outreach Strategies

- None identified

References: ¹Alcorn (1988); ²Brown et al. (2001); ³IWJV (in prep.); ⁴Oring and Reed (1996); ⁵Oring et al. (2000); ⁶Rubega et al. (2000); ⁷Shuford et al. (2002); ^{EO}Expert opinion