

Williamson's Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus thyroideus



Photo by Martin Meyers

Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Coniferous Forest Aspen	
Key Habitat Parameters •	
Plant Composition	Ponderosa, Jeffrey, and lodgepole pines, and Douglas-fir for foraging; often aspen for nesting ²
Plant Density & Size	Little information; probably prefers > 30 snags/ ha [12 / ac] with dbh > 30 cm [12 in] ^{2, 4}
Mosaic	Coniferous Forest juxtaposed with Aspen stands, with standing snags ²
Distance to Water	No known relationship
Response to Fragmentation	Probably fairly tolerant due to small home ranges ²
Response to Vegetation Removal	Negative to tree/snag removal; tolerates fires well if some living timber and standing snags remain ^{2, EO}
Area Requirements •	
Minimum Patch Size	~ 15 ha [38 ha] ^{EO}
Recommended Patch Size	> 100 ha [250 ac] ^{EO}
Home Range	~ 4 – 9 ha [10 - 22 ac] ²

Conservation Profile

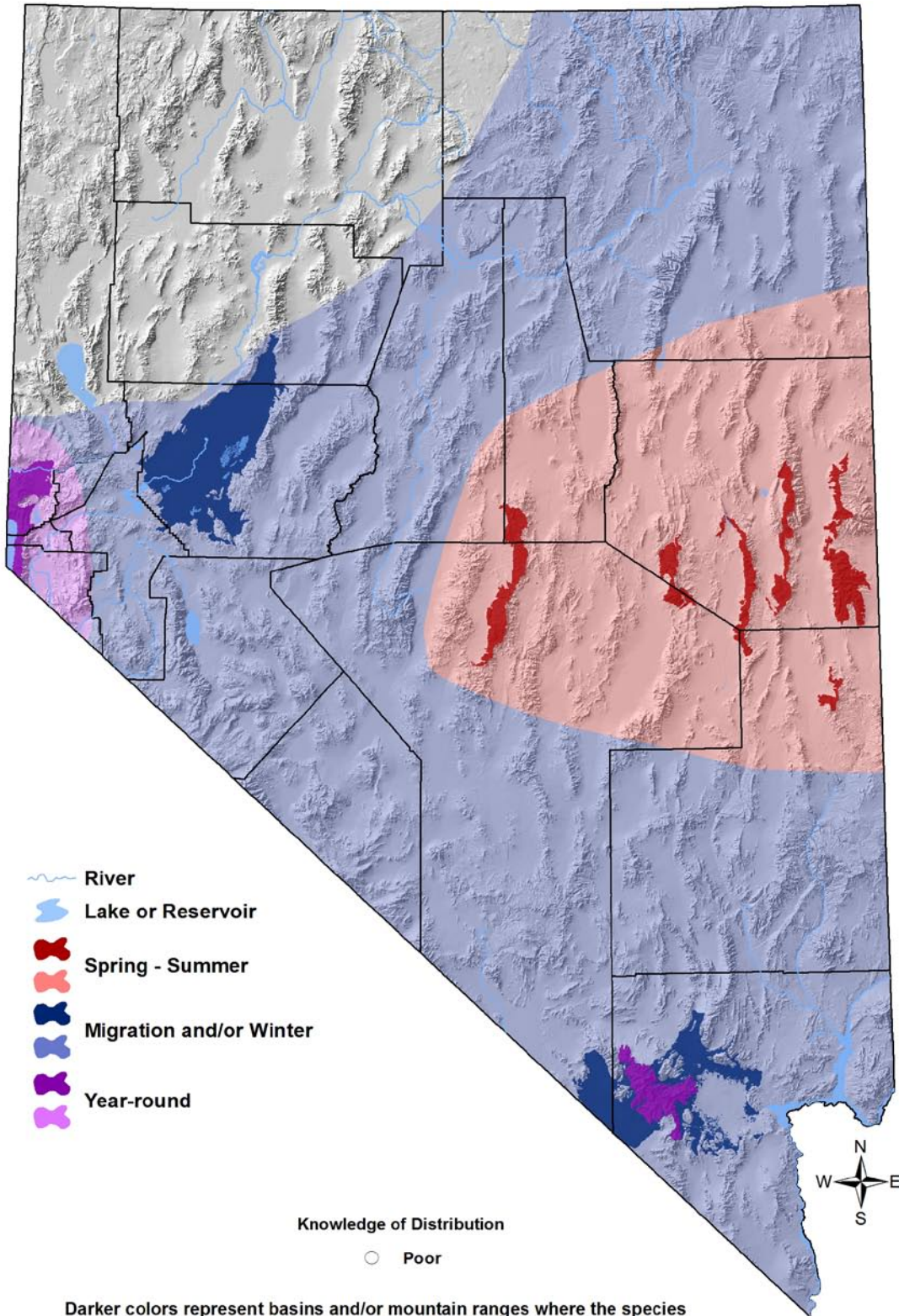
Priority Status	
Conservation Priority Species	
Species Concerns	
Possible declines ² Restricted habitat	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	Stewardship
Audubon Watchlist	Yellow
NV Natural Heritage	S2
USFWS	Bird of Conservation Concern, Migratory Bird
BLM	None
USFS	Management Indicator
NDOW	Stewardship
Trends	
Historical ○	Unknown
Recent •	Pronounced declines in 1980's; more recent trends unclear ^{2, 7}
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada (NBC) •	1,500
Global •	310,000 ⁶
Percent of Global	< 1%
Population Objective	
Maintain ⁶	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	Nevada Bird Count
Coverage in NV	Good
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	Carson Range, White Pine County, Spring Mountains
Restoration	Same

Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Year-round in Carson Range and Spring Mts; Spring – Summer elsewhere ^{2, EO}	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
May – mid-August ^{2, 3}	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	Excavates cavity most often in aspen snag 25 – 70 cm [10 – 27 in] dbh; also in living aspen or conifer with dead top ^{2, 3}
Site Fidelity	High for breeding territory ²
Other	Usually excavates new cavity every year ²
Food Habits	
Basic	Tree trunk prober, gleaner, and borer ²
Primary Diet	Conifer sap wells, especially in non-breeding season ²
Secondary Diet	Ants and other insects in breeding season ²

Williamson's Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus thyroideus



Darker colors represent basins and/or mountain ranges where the species has been recorded within the past 12 years. Lighter colors represent the broader area within which the species is presumed to occur in appropriate habitat types.

Williamson's Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus thyroideus

Overview

Williamson's Sapsucker is somewhat unusual in that it is tightly tied to one forest type (Aspen) for nesting, and another (Coniferous Forest) for foraging. Populations in Nevada are fragmented, and the species apparently does not breed in large portions of central Nevada despite the availability of presumably suitable habitat. In western and southern Nevada, Williamson's Sapsuckers occur year-round, and in eastern Nevada, they are summer breeders that migrate. Their seasonal distribution around the state is very poorly known, and the range map shown above could change significantly with the collection of additional data. During migration, Williamson's Sapsuckers may occur broadly in pinyon-juniper or riparian woodlands.²

Because Williamson's Sapsuckers nest primarily in snags or live trees with broken or dead tops, older forest stands with some decadence will usually be most suitable,^{5, EO} especially if snags are concentrated in patches and relatively large.¹ Possible threats are poorly characterized, although it can be inferred that loss or degradation of higher-elevation aspen stands or a significant decrease in snag density would be detrimental. Preserving a landscape matrix in which healthy Coniferous Forest and Aspen habitats are both readily available will be beneficial.

Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat

Birds / 40 ha on NBC Transects in the Great Basin Region (Mojave data insufficient)

Primary Habitat at Transect	Transects Occupied	Birds/40 ha (95% C.I.)
Coniferous Forest	32% (6/19)	1.8 (0.4 – 3.2)
Aspen	11% (2/18)	0.4 (-0.1 – 0.9)

- Where measured elsewhere within the West, densities range from 2 – 8 birds / 40 ha²
- BBS-based population estimate for Nevada (500 birds)⁵ is lower than NBC estimate (1,500)

Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses

Landscape Associations (NBC data)

- Seven out of eight NBC transects where Williamson's Sapsuckers were present were dominated by montane Coniferous Forest (the eighth had a large Pinyon-Juniper component); six of the transects had a secondary Aspen component (1-7% of land cover according to GIS vegetation map).

Williamson's Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus thyroideus

Main Threats and Challenges

Habitat Threats

- Reported to be relatively resistant to many typical habitat disturbances such as fire, grazing, and logging as long as some forest patches and snags remain²
- Loss of snags to fire, salvage logging
- Loss or degradation of aspen woodland

Research, Planning, and Monitoring Challenges

- Habitat use and patch size requirements for Nevada populations is not fully understood
- The seasonal distribution of the species is very poorly understood

Conservation Strategies

Habitat Strategies

- Coniferous Forest (p. Hab-5-1) and Aspen (p. Hab-3-1) habitat conservation strategies benefit this species
- Within known range, give special conservation consideration to aspen stands located within a coniferous forest matrix
- Retain aspen snags of the preferred size range, in clumps wherever possible

Research, Planning, and Monitoring Strategies

- Continue monitoring to better determine current population trends
- Conduct surveys in suitable habitat in areas where Williamson's Sapsucker is currently undocumented
- Conduct research to better determine habitat and patch size requirements, and seasonal distribution patterns

Public Outreach Strategies

- None identified

References: ¹Conway and Martin; ²Dobbs et al. (1997); ³GBBO unpublished Atlas data; ⁴GBBO (2008a); ⁵Gyug et al. (2009); ⁶Rich et al. (2004); ⁷Sauer et al. (2008); ^{EO} Expert opinion