

# Black-necked Stilt

*Himantopus mexicanus*



Photo by Larry Neel

### Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Ephemeral Wetlands/Playas Marsh Open Water (shorelines)	
Key Habitat Parameters ●	
Plant Composition	Bulrush, sedges, rushes, cattail
Plant Density	Sparse cover or unvegetated <sup>1</sup>
Mosaic	Shallow marsh with low stem densities, interspersed with dry spots, mudflats, open water <sup>1</sup>
Water Depth	< 30 cm (12") <sup>EO</sup>
Hydrology	Stage can be variable <sup>EO</sup>
Water Quality	Prefers fairly low salinity <sup>1</sup>
Response to Vegetation Removal	Probably positive to prescribed burns in overgrown sites <sup>EO</sup>
Area Requirements ●	
Minimum Patch Size	Unknown
Recommended Patch Size	≥130 ha (300 ac) <sup>1</sup>
Home Range	Unknown

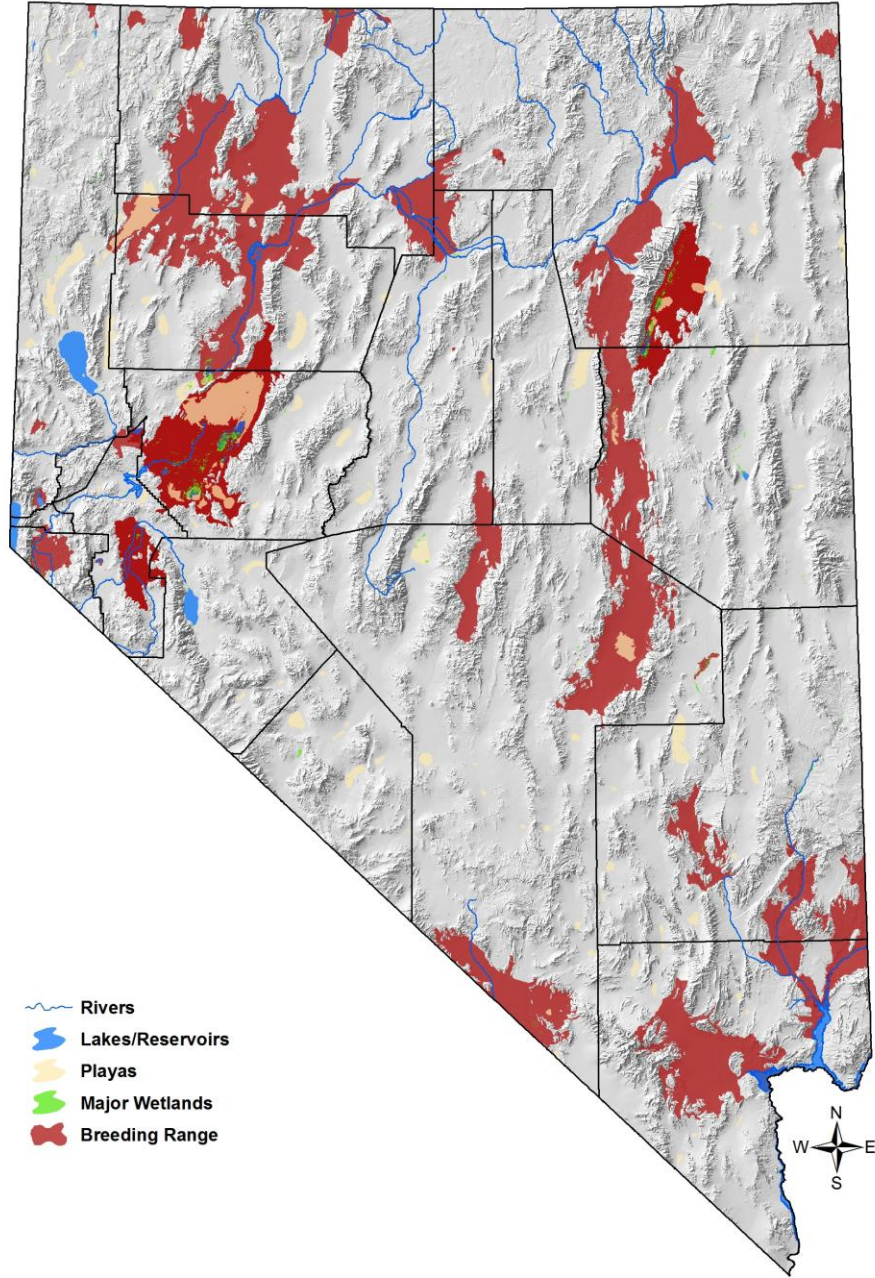
### Conservation Profile

Priority Status	
Conservation Species	
Species Concerns	
Habitat threats	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	None
Audubon Watchlist	None
NV Natural Heritage	S3S4B
USFWS	Migratory Bird
BLM	None
USFS	None
NDOW	Conservation Priority
IW Shorebird Plan	Critically Important
Trends	
Historical ●	Probable range contractions, but patterns in Nevada unclear <sup>1</sup>
Recent ●	Probably declining in Nevada <sup>EO</sup>
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada ●	3,000; highly variable <sup>EO</sup>
Global ●	175,000 <sup>2,3</sup>
Percent of Global ●	2 - 4%
Population Objective	
Increase by 30% <sup>EO</sup>	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	WMA and NWR counts, Aquatic Bird Count
Coverage in NV ●	Fair in WMAs and NWRs, Poor elsewhere
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	Lahontan Valley, Humboldt Sink, Ruby Lake NWR, Franklin Lake
Restoration	Lahontan Valley, Humboldt Sink, northwestern playas

### Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Spring – Summer	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
Early April – July <sup>4</sup>	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	Near shoreline in sparse vegetation, often slightly elevated <sup>1</sup> or on mats of submerged vegetation <sup>EO</sup>
Site Fidelity	Unknown
Other	Semi-colonial nester <sup>1</sup>
Food Habits	
Basic	Invertebrates, ground/water forager
Primary Prey	Invertebrates from sediment, water column <sup>1</sup>
Secondary Prey	Small fish, seeds <sup>1</sup>

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References: <sup>1</sup> Robinson et al. (1999), <sup>2</sup> WHSRN, <sup>3</sup> Morrison 2006, <sup>4</sup> GBBO unpubl. atlas data, <sup>EO</sup> expert opinion

### **Overview**

Like the more numerous and equally handsome American Avocet, the Black-necked Stilt is able to exploit ephemeral wetlands and other temporarily favorable wetland conditions. During wet years, their populations can show significant peaks. Compared to avocets, stilts are less tolerant of saline or alkaline waters, are less colonial, and also forage in emergent vegetation (Robinson et al. 1999). Stilts primarily breed in the Great Basin portion of the state, but breeding has also been confirmed in southern Nevada. Collectively, the Great Basin (including the Great Salt Lake) accounts for a large proportion of the species' global breeding range. Within the Great Basin, the species is known to wander widely among ephemeral and permanent wetlands in preparation of fall migration (Robinson and Oring 1996).

### **Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat**

- Ten-year average estimate for statewide population of 3,000 includes 2,400 in Lahontan Valley and 600 in other scattered sites across the state
- Ten-year peak population estimate ~ 7,000 statewide

### **Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses**

- To be added

### **Main Threats and Challenges**

#### **Habitat Threats**

Threats to Marshes and Ephemeral Wetlands apply to this species (see habitat accounts), and the following specifically:

- General loss or degradation of wetlands
- Increased salinization of wetlands and accumulation of contaminants (Robinson et al. 1999)
- Loss of vernal wetlands due to water diversions, flood control projects, or extended drought

### **Species with Similar Conservation Strategies**

- American Avocet
- Snowy Plover

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### **Further Reading**

Shuford, W.D., Page, G.W., and L.E. Stenzel. 2002. Patterns of distribution and abundance of migratory shorebirds in the Intermountain West of the United States. *Western Birds* 33(3):134-174.

Rubega, M.A. and J.A. Robinson. 1997. Water salinization and shorebirds: emerging issues. *Int. Water Studies* 9:45-54.

### **Conservation Strategies**

#### **Habitat Strategies**

1. Habitat strategies for marshes and ephemeral wetlands will benefit this species (see habitat accounts).
2. Encourage conservation and maintenance of seasonal water ( $\leq 6$  inches) in ephemeral wetlands, saltgrass meadows, especially during periods of extended drought.
3. Wetlands with uneven bottoms and shallow islands or clumps of matted emergent vegetation are especially important in the management of key nesting areas.
4. The larger environment of nesting wetlands, and migration season wetlands, should include have large areas of sparsely vegetated areas with water depths of  $\leq 12$  inches.
5. Artificial wetlands can provide productive breeding habitat; ideal configuration involves a  $\geq 130$  ha (300 ac) site with a 2:1 ratio of shallow water ( $< 15$  cm, 6.5 inches) to elevated nesting surfaces (Robinson et al. 1999).

#### **Research, Planning, and Monitoring**

1. Conduct additional research and monitoring for water quality in important breeding areas.
2. Develop a shorebird monitoring plan that includes a sampling plan for ephemeral wetlands.
3. Develop water management strategies for managed wetlands that address macroinvertebrate availability during spring and late summer/fall migration.
4. Conduct research to determine macroinvertebrate production in managed wetlands to better project and reach population objectives.