

Northern Pintail

Anas acuta



Photo by Chris Nicolai

Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Marsh Open Water	
Key Habitat Parameters ●	
Plant Composition	Cattail, bulrush, sedges, rushes, saltgrass, aquatic (submerged) vegetation, agricultural crops
Plant Density	Patches of various emergent stem densities and ample aquatic vegetation; winter: sparse emergent vegetation ¹
Mosaic	Shallow marsh with variable stem densities, interspersed with open water, buffered by shrubland, grassland, or agriculture ^{1,3}
Water Depth	< 30 cm (12") for foraging ¹
Hydrology	Large variety of water regimes ¹
Response to Vegetation Removal	Probably negative in breeding habitat ^{EO}
Area Requirements ●	
Minimum Patch Size	Unknown, but tolerates moderately sized wetlands ^{EO}
Recommended Patch Size	≥ 15 ha (33 ac) for wetland; buffer of 3 km (2 mi) of uplands ^{EO}
Home Range	Up to 500 ha (1,100 ac) ¹

Conservation Profile

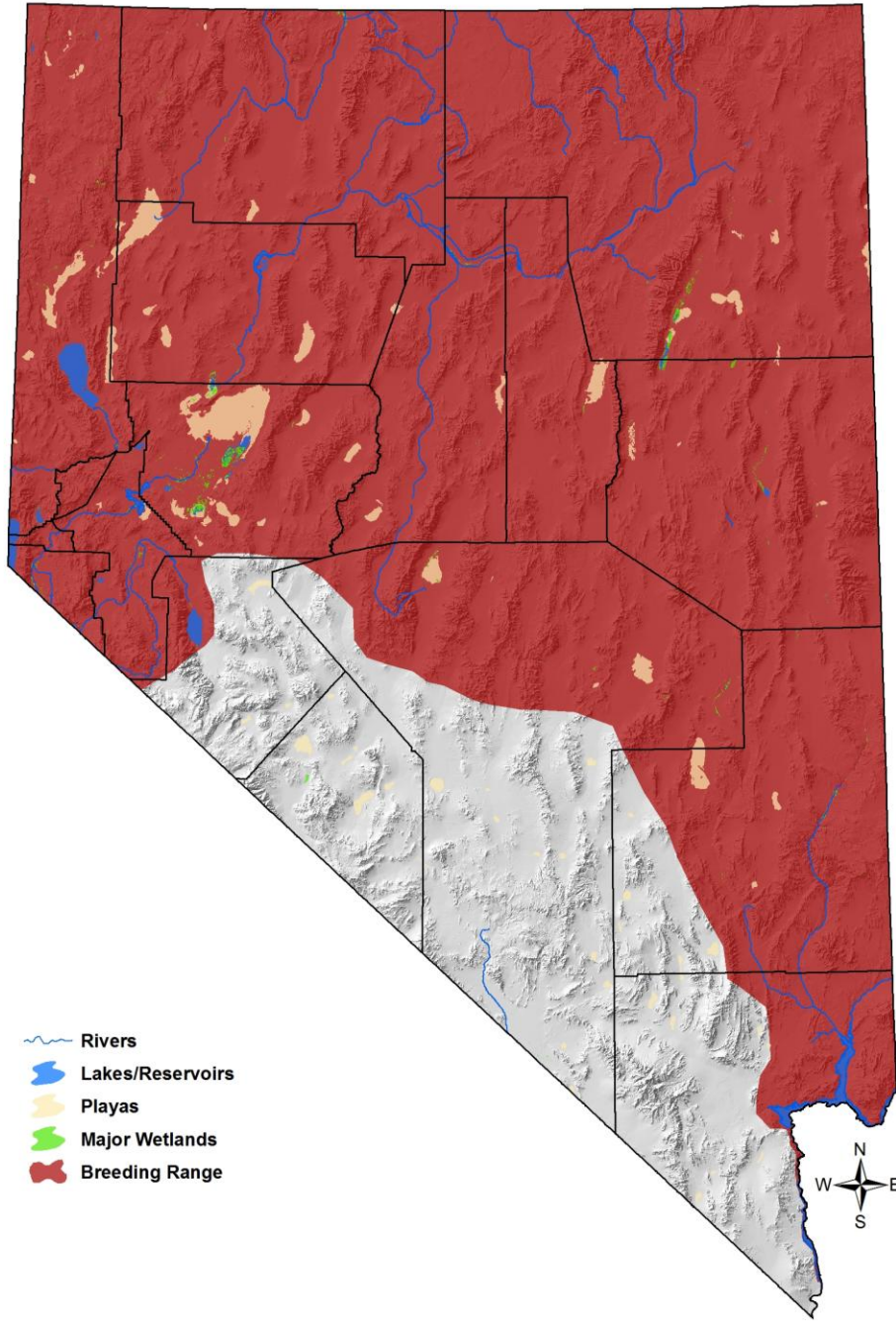
Priority Status	
Conservation Species	
Species Concerns	
Historic and recent population declines Habitat threats	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	None
Audubon Watchlist	None
NV Natural Heritage	S5
USFWS	Migratory Bird
BLM	None
USFS	None
NDOW	Conservation Priority, Gamebird
Pacific Flyway Council	High Priority
Trends	
Historical ●	Rangewide declines by 50% ¹
Recent ●	Declines rangewide and in the west ¹
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada ●	5,000 breeding; highly variable ²
Global ●	3,000,000; highly variable ¹
Percent of Global ●	< 1%
Population Objective	
Increase by 100% ^{EO}	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	NDOW aerial surveys, NWR and WMA counts, NDOW harvest counts, Aquatic Bird Count
Coverage in NV ●	Very good
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	Lahontan and Ruby valleys, Humboldt River system
Restoration	All marsh and open water in Great Basin

Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Year-round	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
Late April – mid-August ⁴	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	On ground in dense upland vegetation; may be up to 3 km (2 mi) from wetland ¹
Site Fidelity	High for post-breeding habitat ¹ ; moderate for wintering ⁵
Food Habits	
Basic	Primarily invertebrates; dabbler
Primary Prey	Aquatic invertebrates and plant material ¹
Secondary Prey	n/a

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Note to Reviewers: Map will be made more spatially explicit

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References: ¹ Austin and Miller (1995), ² WAP Team (2006), ³ Fleskes et al. (2003), ⁴ GBBO unpubl. atlas data, ⁵ Robertson and Cooke (1999), ^{E0} expert opinion

Overview

The Northern Pintail is one of the west's most conspicuous and numerous ducks, but it has also suffered substantial and sustained declines for many decades. Harvest rates are not believed to impact population trends, and the underlying causes of declines are currently not well understood. About 2 million Northern Pintails migrate through the entire Great Basin each year, which comprises most of the Pacific Flyway population size estimate (Kadlec and Smith 1989). This species requires intact wetlands with emergent vegetation, and it requires a fairly significant buffer of upland vegetation or other suitable habitat (e.g., traditional agriculture) for nesting.

Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat

- Breeding density varies with wetland size (Austin and Miller 1995), but Nevada specific densities currently unknown

Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses

- None

Main Threats and Challenges

- Loss and degradation of suitable marsh habitat (Austin and Miller 1995)
- Cultivation and agricultural disturbances in upland breeding sites (Austin and Miller 1995)
- Predation of nesting females can be substantial (Austin and Miller 1995)
- Susceptible to avian botulism and cholera (Austin and Miller 1995)

Species with Similar Conservation Strategies

- Tundra Swan
- Trumpeter Swan
- Lesser Scaup

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Conservation Strategies

Established Strategies

1. Pacific Flyway Council and NDOW monitor populations

Habitat Strategies

1. Marsh and Open Water conservation strategies benefit this species (see habitat accounts)
2. Hunting mortality not assumed to have impact on populations (Austin and Miller 1995), so habitat-based management tools especially important for Northern Pintails
3. Northern Pintails readily use restored wetlands

Public Outreach

1. Where nesting occurs in agricultural uplands, seek to prevent nest disturbances by farm machinery during vulnerable period

Research, Planning, and Monitoring

1. Additional monitoring or research is needed to determine underlying causes of declines, or whether they are the result of shifts in regional densities
2. Additional research is needed to determine whether Nevada breeding populations adhere to the patterns of habitat use described for the broader Pacific Flyway region
3. Need to better determine location of any key wintering sites for roosting or feeding in central and southern Nevada