

# Snowy Egret

*Egretta thula*



Photo by Larry Neel

### Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Marsh Lowland Riparian Open Water	
Key Habitat Parameters ●	
Plant Composition	Fremont cottonwood, willow spp., Russian olive, cattail, bulrush, sedges
Plant Density, Age	Old-growth trees, significant patches of willows, or very dense emergent vegetation required for nesting; intermediate densities of marsh vegetation for foraging <sup>1</sup>
Mosaic	Tree or willow groves near waterway or major wetland; large wetland/riparian complex preferred <sup>1,EO</sup>
Water Depth	< 20 cm (8") in marsh for foraging <sup>1</sup>
Hydrology	No known relationship
Response to Vegetation Removal	Negative to removal of nesting substrate <sup>EO</sup>
Area Requirements ●	
Minimum Patch Size	Unknown; uses small wetlands for foraging, but probably requires large patches for nesting <sup>EO</sup>
Recommended Patch Size	150 ha (370 ac) of riparian and wetland <sup>EO</sup>
Home Range	Apprx. 500 ha (1,100 ac) <sup>EO</sup>

### Conservation Profile

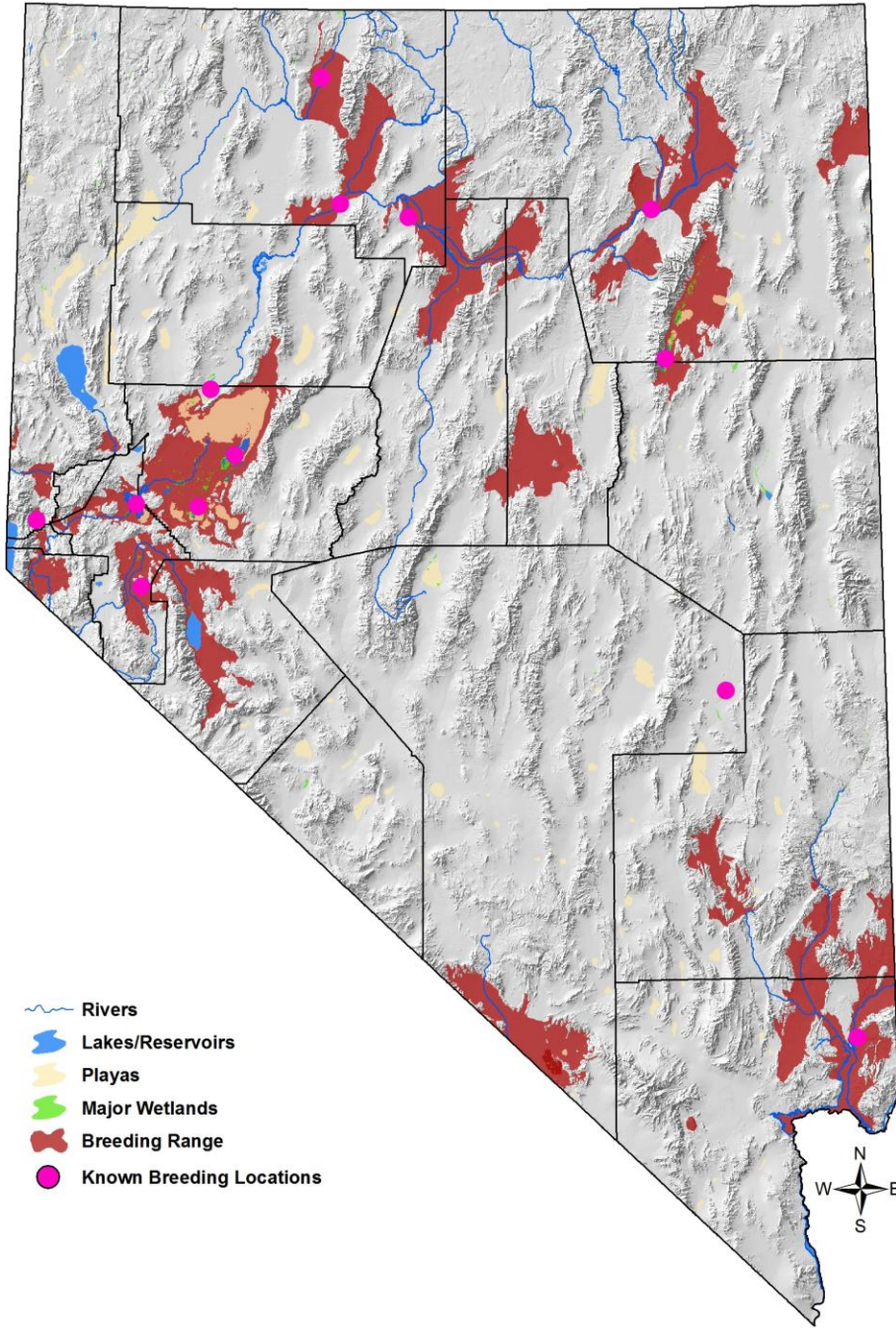
Priority Status	
Conservation Species	
Species Concerns	
Past population declines Small population size Habitat threats	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	None
Audubon Watchlist	None
NV Natural Heritage	S4B
USFWS	Migratory Bird
BLM	None
USFS	None
NDOW	Conservation Priority
IW Waterbird Plan	High Concern
Trends	
Historical ●	Rangewide declines, followed by increases <sup>1</sup>
Recent ●	Regionally probably declining <sup>2</sup> ; rangewide increases <sup>3</sup>
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada ●	600; highly variable <sup>2</sup>
Global ●	143,000 <sup>3</sup>
Percent of Global ●	< 1%
Population Objective	
Maintain/Increase <sup>EO</sup>	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	NDOW aerial surveys, NWR and WMA counts, Aquatic Bird Count
Coverage in NV ●	Fair/Good
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	All major rivers, Lahontan and Ruby valleys
Restoration	All major rivers, Lahontan and Ruby valleys

### Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Spring – summer	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
April – early June <sup>4</sup>	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	Platform nests in trees or thickets <sup>1</sup>
Site Fidelity	High for colony site <sup>1</sup>
Other	Highly colonial nester in mixed or single species colonies, may re-use nests <sup>1</sup>
Food Habits	
Basic	Predatory; ambush prey in water column
Primary Prey	Fish, crustaceans, aquatic invertebrates <sup>1</sup>
Secondary Prey	Small amphibian and terrestrial vertebrates <sup>1</sup>

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References: <sup>1</sup> Parsons and Master (2000), <sup>2</sup> Ivey and Herziger (2006), <sup>3</sup> Kushlan et al (2002), <sup>4</sup> GBBO unpubl. atlas data, <sup>EO</sup> expert opinion

### 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 20<sup>th</sup> century (Parsons and Master 2000). Information about recent trends is somewhat contradictory for our region (Sauer et al. 2008), though Ivey and Herziger's (2006) finding of significant declines in the Intermountain West is probably reliable. Nevada's populations appear stable, however (L. Neel pers. comm.), despite significant annual and drought-dependent variation in numbers. Recent threats to Snowy Egrets appear to consist primarily of generalized habitat threats rather than species-specific issues. However, additional effort may be devoted to studying the specific habitat and conservation needs for this colonially-breeding bird.

### Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat

- High counts 1,000 in Lahontan Valley in 2004 (NDOW, pers. comm.)

### Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses

- None

### Main Threats and Challenges

- Loss of suitable breeding habitat (riparian tree groves of sufficient size)
- Loss or dewatering of suitable marshes for nesting foraging
- Prolonged droughts
- Mercury may be a concern in the Carson River system during drought years [insert Hill et al. reference]

### Species with Similar Conservation Strategies

- Least Bittern

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**Conservation Strategies**

**Habitat Strategies**

1. Marsh and Lowland Riparian conservation strategies benefit this species (see habitat accounts)
2. Maintain flooded emergent marsh with high stem densities (ideally, bulrush) that can support platform nests during nesting between 1 May and 15 July.
3. Manage wetlands to provide fish populations through the breeding season for at least two years in every ten-year period.

**Research, Planning, and Monitoring**

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