

Lesser Scaup

Aythya affinis



Photo by Larry Neel

Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Marsh Open Water (Wet Meadow)	
Key Habitat Parameters ●	
Plant Composition	Cattail, bulrush, sedges, wet meadow grasses
Plant Density	For breeding, overhead cover of 36 – 45%, height 20 – 60 cm [8 – 23 in] ¹
Mosaic	Water bodies with shallows for foraging and sufficiently dense shoreline or upland vegetation cover for nests ¹
Water Depth	< 3 m [10 ft] in open-water foraging areas ¹
Water Quality	Uses fresh to moderately saline water ¹
Response to Vegetation Removal	Negative for breeding ^{EO}
Area Requirements ○	
Minimum Patch Size	Unknown, but may breed in small lakes or marshes ¹
Recommended Patch Size	> 10 ha [25 ac] ^{EO}
Home Range / Territory Size	Unknown

Conservation Profile

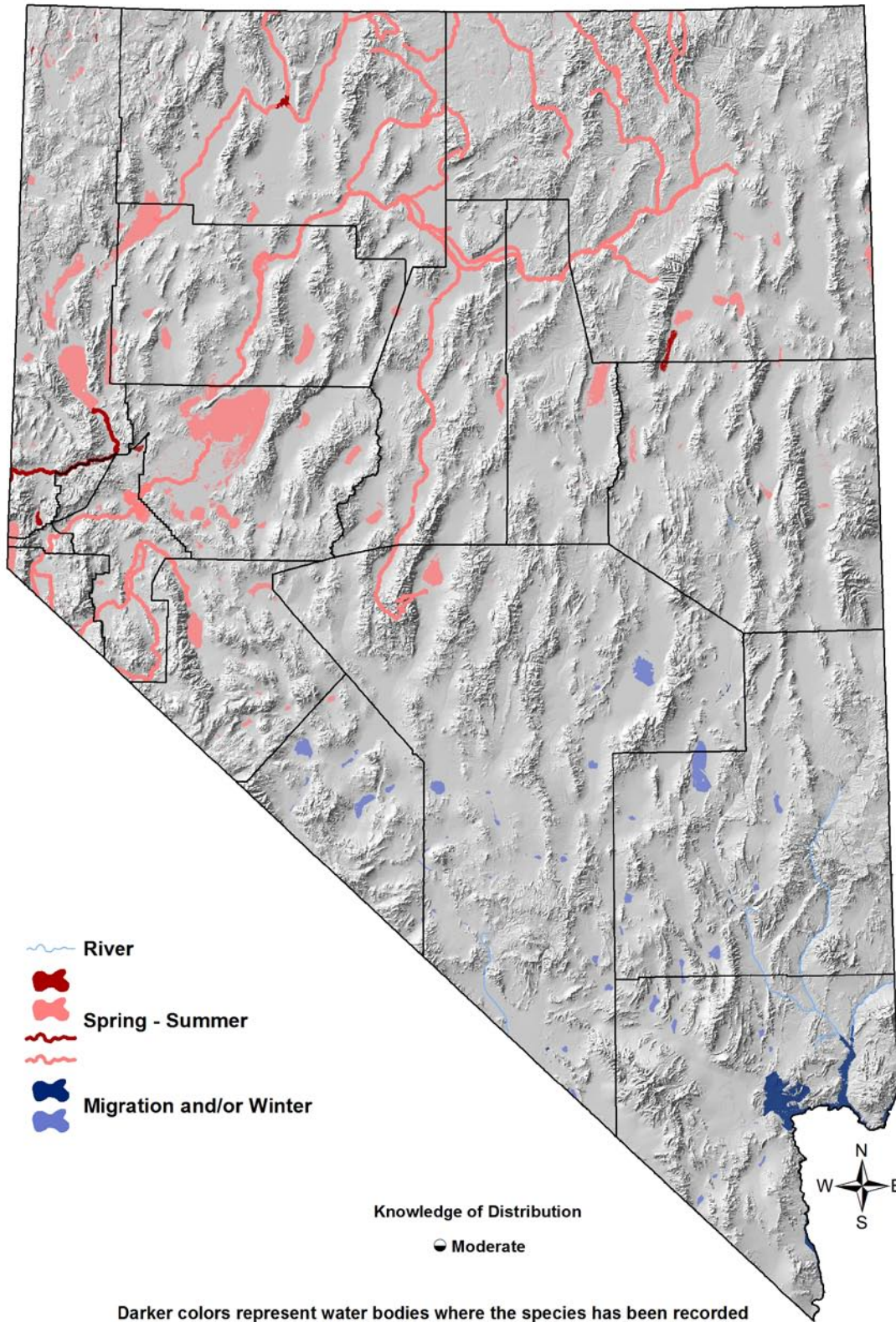
Priority Status	
Conservation Priority Species	
Species Concerns	
Recent declines Habitat threats Possibly small population size	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	None
Audubon Watchlist	None
NV Natural Heritage	S1B
USFWS	Migratory Bird
BLM	None
USFS	None
NDOW	Gamebird
Pacific Flyway Council	High
Trends	
Historical ○	Unknown
Recent ●	Declining ^{1, 2, 3}
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada ○	~ 650 (breeding), annually variable ^{4, EO}
Global ●	4,500,000 ^{1, 3}
Percent of Global	< 1%
Population Objective	
Maintain / Increase ^{EO}	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	NDOW aerial surveys, NWR and WMA counts, NDOW hunter surveys, Aquatic Bird Count
Coverage in NV	Good
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	Ruby Lake NWR
Restoration	Degraded marshes

Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Spring – Summer (northern Nevada) Winter (southern Nevada) Spring (migration, statewide, April-May peak) Fall (migration, statewide, October peak)	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
May – August ¹	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	Usually on ground near water or on uplands < 160 m [525 ft] from water edge, under dense vegetation cover ¹
Site Fidelity	Unknown
Food Habits	
Basic	Diver
Primary Diet	Aquatic invertebrates, including molluscs ¹
Secondary Diet	Plant material ¹

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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

The Lesser Scaup is the most widespread and abundant diving duck in North America,¹ but in Nevada it is breeding at the far southern margin of its continental breeding range. As such, Scaup are present in small numbers and distributed sporadically across the northern part of the state, with a concentration in northeastern Nevada and one clear breeding “hotspot” at Ruby Lakes NWR.⁵ Interestingly, Lesser Scaup are either absent or rare as breeders in Lahontan Valley, in contrast to our other waterfowl. They are also very late spring migrants, and nesting does not begin until late May.¹

Lesser Scaup are present in Nevada in substantially greater numbers during migration, but no seasonally-specific population estimates are available. Therefore many of the areas shown in the map above as “Spring – Summer” range may be equally or more important as migration habitat. Scaup have been confirmed to winter in southern Nevada, and there is possibly scattered wintering in the north as well (www.ebird.org), although evidence of this is less compelling.

In most respects, Lesser Scaup are not well studied despite their relative continental ubiquity.¹ They accept a fairly wide range of water conditions and wetland sizes, but for nesting, they require the presence of dense terrestrial vegetation near the shoreline, with wet meadows being especially suitable. Breeders tend to gravitate towards small ephemeral or semi-permanent wetlands.¹ Winter and migration distribution and habitat requirements are not as well known, although like many other ducks Lesser Scaup use larger and more open water bodies during the non-breeding season.

Ongoing regional declines are a concern, and continental population remain well below the goal of 6.3 million set by USFWS.³ In Nevada, key strategies are the protection of major breeding areas, conservation of smaller semi-permanent wetlands, and learning more about seasonal status and needs. As with other waterfowl, population trends are closely monitored and harvest limits adjusted as needed by NDOW and Pacific Flyway Council.

Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat

- Average count at Ruby Lake NWR is 400 birds, with high annual variability^{1, 4}
- Nevada breeding population estimate is based on Ruby Lake NWR estimate plus a smaller number for other areas of the state

Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses

No information

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Main Threats and Challenges

Habitat Threats

- Loss and degradation of marsh and open water habitat due to water diversions, declines in water quality, or development
- Reduction of shoreline cover or trampling during nesting season due to livestock grazing¹

Research, Planning, and Monitoring Challenges

- Key migration and wintering sites need to be better identified

Conservation Strategies

Established Strategies

- Annual harvest rates are set by NDOW in consultation with the Pacific Flyway Council

Habitat Strategies

- Marsh (p. Hab-9-1) and Open Water (p. Hab-15-1) habitat conservation strategies benefit this species
- Protect shoreline vegetation in breeding sites by deferring grazing or other disruptive activities during the nesting period (15 May – 1 August)
- Manage smaller semi-permanent wetlands to maintain water through August, and for intact shoreline vegetation

Research, Planning, and Monitoring Strategies

- Important winter and migration sites need to be better identified, though improved inventory and monitoring efforts

Public Outreach Strategies

- In areas where small breeding wetlands are located on private lands, encourage landowners to defer grazing and potentially disruptive land uses along shoreline areas until after the nesting period (15 May – 1 August)

References: ¹Austin et al. (1998); ²Austin et al. (2000); ³USFWS (1998); ⁴USFWS (2001); ⁵Floyd et al. (2007); ^{EO} Expert opinion