



BENT'S OLD FORT

Birds

James P. Gionfriddo, Denise R. Culver, & Joe Stevens,
Colorado Natural Heritage Program

Importance

Hundreds of species of birds occur in the American Southwest, as do some of the best birdwatching opportunities. Birds are a highly visible component of many ecosystems. Because they can respond quickly to changes in resource conditions, birds are considered good indicators of ecosystem health. Monitoring changes in bird population and community parameters can be an important component of any comprehensive, long-term monitoring program. Monitoring birds is especially critical given population declines for some species in recent decades, especially neotropical migratory birds.

Status and Trends

Few inventories had been taken of avian species at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (BEOL) prior to 2001. In the summer of 2001 and spring of 2002, the Colorado Natural Heritage Program conducted surveys of birds at BEOL. The surveys provide baseline information for future inventory and monitoring efforts. Combined, the surveys documented 72 species, or 67% of the avian species that occurred on a master list for BEOL. The majority of the species recorded were passerines (Figure 1). Passerine species observed include: the Western kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), grasshopper sparrow



ROBERT BENNETTS

Common nighthawk

(*Ammodramus savannarum*), common yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), and loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*). Species observed from the remaining bird groups include: the common nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), red-headed woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), American bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), white-faced ibis (*Plegadis chihi*), North-

RESOURCE BRIEF



PHOTO: ROBERT SHANTZ

Loggerhead shrike

ern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), cinnamon teal (*Anas cyanoptera*), Northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), and black tern (*Chlidonias niger*). There was evidence of birds breeding at BEOL during the May 2002 survey. Birds were observed visiting active nests; collecting and carrying nesting materials or food; copulating; and traveling, loafing, and foraging in pairs.

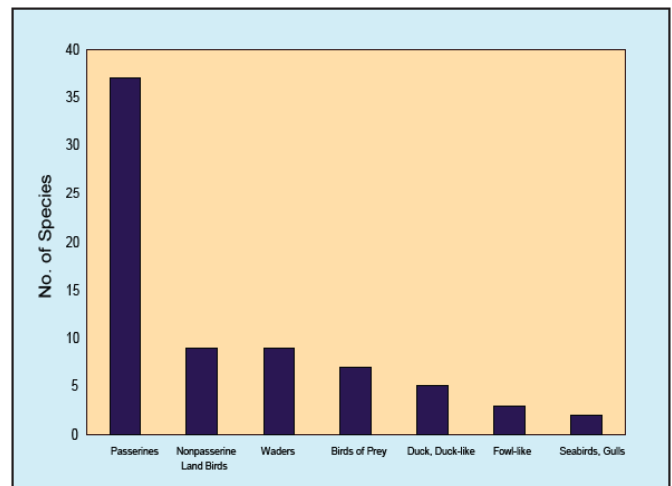


Figure 1. The number of species in each group recorded during 2001 & 2002 surveys.

Discussion

Although the rate of documentation of new bird species declined as the field survey progressed in 2002, many additional species at BEOL probably remain undocumented. Species were probably not detected because they may occur at low densities and/or they make only brief appearances at the site.