

Breeding Birds

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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

The Fort Larned National Historic Site (FOLS), located in central Pawnee County, Kansas, is comprised of developed areas, grassland, and the Pawnee River lined by a wooded riparian corridor. A detached 44-acre parcel consists of native mixed-grass prairie. No inventories of the birds of FOLS had been conducted prior to 2001. In May-June, 2001, the Kansas Natural Heritage Inventory (KSNHI) conducted surveys for birds during the breeding season. Prior to the field work, lists of birds were compiled based on the best available resources



PHOTO: ROBERT SHANTZ

House Wren

RESOURCE BRIEF



PHOTO: J. & K. HOLLINGSWORTH

Western meadowlark

(e.g., KSNHI databases, museum specimens, books/guides, and knowledgeable staff). The results of the inventory provide valuable baseline information for future inventory and monitoring.

Fifty-seven bird species were documented during the surveys for breeding birds; these include the red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), downy woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), common nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), black-capped chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*), house wren (*Troglodytes aedon*), Eastern and Western meadowlark (*Sturnella magna* and *S. neglecta*, respectively), and American goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*). All of these listed birds were noted as common in abundance. Breeding was confirmed for 10 bird species (three of those listed above).

Discussion

Using a revised (based on project results) master species list for birds, 57 of 78 (or 73%) of the expected species have been documented at FOLS. Additional surveys are recommended for both breeding and non-breeding birds. The species that have been documented at FOLS are common birds of grasslands and woodland edge. The woodlands are especially important to bird diversity, with species associated with trees accounting for 84% of those encountered. However, grassland birds are the most numerous due to the preponderance of grassland habitat at the park.