

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

Pecos National Historical Park (PECO), 6,800 acres in size, lies in the Upper Pecos River Valley. The park's predominant vegetation is pinyon-juniper woodland. Other habitats include grassland areas, riparian habitat along the Pecos River and Glorieta Creek, a riparian restoration area, and marsh habitats. The first thorough survey for breeding birds at PECO was conducted in May-June 2002 by the New Mexico Natural Heritage Program (NMNHP). The inventory results provide baseline information: on the current status of birds; and for future inventory and monitoring.



Violet-green swallow

Eighty-five bird species were documented at PECO during the 2002 breeding season (87% of those on a target list). Species using grassland habitats accounted for 27.1% of the species, those using pinyon-juniper habitats accounted for

31.8%, and those using riparian habitats accounted for 78.8% of the species (many species used more than one habitat type). Species recorded included: the black-chinned hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*) and vesper sparrow (*Pooecetes*



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Yellow warbler

gramineus) in grassland habitat; the greater roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) and rufous-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps*) in pinyon-juniper habitat; and the great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) and Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) in riparian habitat.

Sixty-two species were detected during 8 days of point counts in 2002. The most frequently detected bird was the violet-green swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*), with 10.4% of all detections, followed by the Brewer's blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) (7.3%), the Western wood-pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) (6.6%), and the yellow warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) (5.2%). The remaining species each averaged less than 1.2% ($\pm 1.2\%$) of all detections.

Discussion

Twelve additional bird species not documented in the 2002 breeding season are on a target list for PECO. The most likely cause of non-detections was limited habitat. Of those species not observed, the absence of Lewis's woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) is of special note because it was noted as a common breeder along the Pecos River in 1989. Restoration efforts and the absence of livestock grazing at PECO have benefited various species using woody riparian vegetation.