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Birds and mammals of the Bear Lake basin, Utah

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BIRDS AND MAMMALS

Many bird species use Bear Lake seasonally or during migrations. Herons, egrets, sandpipers, rails, pelicans, geese, coots, grebes, Tundra swans and osprey are common visitors throughout the year. During the spring months of April through June the area becomes the primary breeding grounds for the burrowing owl, gray flycatcher, long-billed curlew, peregrine falcon, and the black-throated gray warbler. Early in the summer months, several species of mergansers and diving ducks converge on the rocky shorelines to fish as the newly hatched Bear Lake sculpin occupy shallow waters during this period. During winter the area becomes critical habitat for the American eagle and Swainson's hawk.

The uplands of Bear Lake Valley are home to many terrestrial birds including black-billed magpies, common ravens, broad-tailed hummingbirds, downy woodpeckers, European starlings, neo-tropical birds and introduced partridges and quail. Game species such as chukar, ruffled, and blue grouse populations are yearlong residents of the mountain brush in higher elevations where they nest and brood between April and July.

Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge is a large natural preserve established on 19,000 acres of wetlands at the north end of Bear Lake. The main purpose of the refuge is to protect, restore and manage nesting habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. The Refuge is considered one of the most important resting and staging areas for migrating waterfowl in North America. In spring and summer, it is an extremely productive nesting area. The Audubon Society has identified the Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge as an Important Bird Areas (IBA). The IBA Program identifies those places that are critical to birds during some part of their life cycle (breeding, wintering, feeding, migrating) in order to minimize the effects that habitat loss, and degradation have on bird populations. Read more about this program at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/index.html>.

A partnership has been formed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service and Utah Power to work together to regulate the levels of water in the refuge. A checklist for bird species viewed within the refuge lists 160 species (U.S. Fish and Wildlife, 1993).



Tundra Swans

Photo from: www.utahbirds.org

The following table displays an inventory of bird species assigned to critical or high priority habitats as listed in the Utah Conservation Data Center (UCDC) central repository for Utah biodiversity information. Critical habitat is defined as “sensitive areas that, because of limited abundance and/or unique qualities, constitute irreplaceable, critical requirements for wildlife” (Edwards et al, 1995). This list excludes federally listed threatened and endangered species.

Aquatic Birds	Birds of Prey	Terrestrial Birds
Wood duck	Western screech owl	Yellow-breasted chat
Wilson's phalarope	Swainson's hawk	Wren species
White-winged scoter	Rough legged hawk	Wilson's snipe
Thayer's gull	Red-tailed hawk	Western tanager
Surf scoter	Prairie falcon	Western meadowlark
Ruddy duck	Peregrine falcon	Warbler species
Ring-necked duck	Northern harrier	Townsend's solitaire
Ring-billed gull	Long-eared owl	Swanson's thrush
Red-necked phalarope	Golden eagle	Spotted snadpiper
Redhead	Ferruginous hawk	Sparrow species
Red-breasted merganser	Burrowing owl	Shrike species
Pacific loon	Barn owl	Say's phoebe
Northern shoveler	American eagle	Sandhill crane
Northern pintail	American kestrel	Sage thrasher
Mallard		Rock pigeon
Long-tailed duck		Northern waterthrush
Long-billed dowitcher		Northern mockingbird
Lesser scaup		Mountain bluebird
Hooded merganser		Killdeer
Herring gull		Green tailed towhee
Glaucous gull		Gray catbird
Franklin's gull		Common redpoll
Common merganser		Common poorwill
Common loon		Bushtit
Common goldeneye		Bunting species
Cinnamon tell		Bullock's oriole
Canvasback		Brown headed cowbird
California gull		Brown creeper
Bufflehead		Brewer's blackbird
Bonaparte's gull		Black-capped chickadee
American coot		American robin
		American redstart

Table 15. Bird Species Present in the Bear Lake Basin With Critical or High Priority Designation (<http://dwrcdc.nr.utah.gov/ucdc/default.asp>).

Many other animal species use the areas surrounding Bear Lake as habitat. The big game species include mule deer, elk, moose, North American pronghorn, mountain lion and coyote. Black bear, though very limited in concentration, are thought to be located on the eastern side of the Lake in U.S. Forest Service Land (BLRC, 2004).

Portions of Rich County provide habitat for several species of furbearers; ground squirrels and pocket gophers, chipmunks, squirrels, skunks, mice/ shrews/ voles, cottontail and jackrabbits, badgers, weasels, bobcats, muskrats and river otters, and raccoons. The snowshoe hare is dependent upon the conifer vegetation above the Lake and the prairie dog colonies along the western edge are noted as supporting the historic black-footed ferret range.

Amphibians with critical habitat include the western chorus frog, northern leopard frog, tiger salamander, Great Basin spadefoot, Columbia spotted frog, and the Woodhouse's toad. The western toad, pictured below, appears on Utah's sensitive species list with an unconfirmed status.

The few reptiles that are common in the basin area are the Great Basin rattlesnake, common and terrestrial garter snakes, striped whipsnake, western skink, gopher snake, Eastern racer and common sagebrush lizard.



Western Toad (*Bufo boreas*)

Photo from Chris Brown at

<http://www.werc.usgs.gov/fieldguide/bubo.htm>

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED

Endangered, threatened, and species of special concern use Bear Lake and its surrounding habitats. Bald eagles and white pelicans stop near the lakeshore to fish and rest during migrations. Grey wolves are expected to be returning to the area as they expand outward from Yellowstone National Park. Numerous bird species on Utah's list of special concern may be residing in the hills surrounding Bear Lake. One of the three strongest sage grouse populations of Utah resides on in the sagebrush steppe to the east of Bear Lake. Pygmy rabbits are found in the tall sage forests around the lakeshore and surrounding areas. Bear Lake spring snails are endemic to the valley and are protected by both Utah and Idaho. For a complete list of special status species that reside in the Bear Lake Valley see Table 16.



Wolves venturing into Utah

Photo from: <http://www.defenders.org/den/dl00082.html>

Common Name	Scientific name	Current Status
Federally Endangered Species		
Black-footed ferret	Mustela nigripe	E
Gray wolf	Canis lupus	E
Utah valvata	Valvata utahensis	U
Federally Threatened Species		
Brown/grizzly bear	Ursus arctos	E
Canada lynx	Lynx Canadensis	U
Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus	P-seasonal
Conservation Agreement Species		
Bonneville cutthroat trout	Oncorhynchus clarki utah	C
Northern Goshawk	Accipiter gentiles	R
Wildlife Species of Concern		
<i>Fish</i>		
Leatherside chub	Gila copei	U
Bear Lake whitefish	Prosopium abyssicola	C
Bonneville cisco	Prosopium gemmifer	C
Bonneville whitefish	Prosopium spilonotus	C
Bear Lake sculpin	Cottus extensus	C
<i>Amphibians</i>		
Western toad	Bufo boreas	U
<i>Birds</i>		
Grasshopper Sparrow	Ammodramus savannarum	R
Short-eared Owl	Asio flammeus	U
Ferruginous Hawk	Buteo regalis	R
Greater Sage-grouse	Centrocercus urophasianus	P
Bobolink	Dolichonyx oryzivorus	U
American White Pelican	Pelecanus erythrorhynchos	R
Three-toed Woodpecker	Picoides tridactylus	U
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Tympanuchus phasianellus	E
<i>Mammals</i>		
Townsend's big-eared bat	Corynorhinus townsendii	P
Pygmy rabbit	Brachylagus idahoensis	C
White-tailed Prairie-dog	Cynomys leucurus	
<i>Mollusks</i>		
Bear Lake springsnail	Pyrgulopsis pilsbryana	R
Lyrate mountain snail	Oreohelix haydeni	U
Western pearlshell	Margaritifera falcate	U

Table 16. Utah's Sensitive Species List. Status is listed above each group. Abbreviations: E = Extirpated, U = unknown/unconfirmed, R = Rare, P = Present, and C = Common ((dwrcdc.nr.utah.gov/ucdc, 2006).