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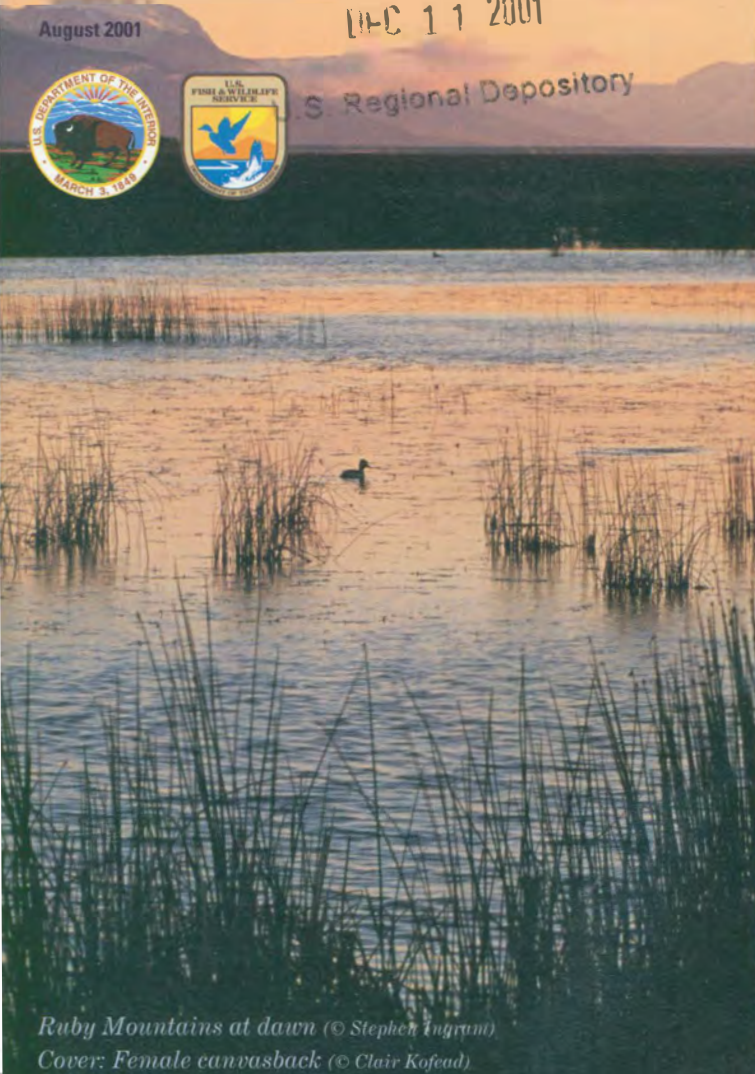
# Ruby Lake

## National Wildlife Refuge

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*Ruby Mountains at dawn* (© Stephen Ingrunt)

*Cover: Female canvasback* (© Clair Kofeud)





*Located in the Great Basin of the West, Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge is a wetland oasis in Nevada's high desert. This remarkable refuge lies along the eastern flank of the scenic, snow-capped Ruby Mountains.*

*A pristine marsh, meadows, grasslands, and shrub-steppe uplands provide essential habitat for thousands of nesting and migrating waterfowl, water birds, songbirds, and native wildlife.*



## A Vibrant Remnant of Ancient Lake Franklin

Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, which supports the largest population of nesting canvasback ducks west of the Mississippi River outside Alaska, is a vital waterfowl nesting area. At 6,000 feet in elevation beneath the snow-covered Ruby Mountains, its 17,000-acre marsh is a remnant of a larger body of water known as Ancient Lake Franklin which existed during the Pleistocene Epoch. Then it covered about 470 square miles and was more than 200 feet deep.

Over 160 springs emanating from the base of the Ruby Mountains provide life-sustaining water to the 37,632-acre refuge. The marsh is surrounded by 20,632 acres of meadows, grasslands, alkali playa, and shrub-steppe uplands. Water elevations in some marsh units are controlled to provide nesting and feeding areas for waterfowl and other marsh bird species. Vegetation in the meadows and grasslands is managed to provide nesting cover and feeding areas for wildlife.



In 1938 President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Ruby Lake as a “refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.” Located along migration corridors serving both the Pacific and Central flyways, this refuge is a crossroads for birds migrating west along the Humboldt River to the Owens Valley, east to Utah’s Great Salt Lake, northwest to the Klamath Basin, and south to the Colorado River Valley.

Ruby Lake Refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the lead wildlife and habitat conservation agency in the nation. A national network of over 500 refuges strives to accomplish the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

*“to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”*

*Above: Canada goose goslings (USFWS);*

*Left: Sandhill crane (©Clair Kofoed);*

*Background: Maverick Springs Range with shooting star in foreground (©Stephen Ingram)*

*The blue goose is the symbol for the National Wildlife Refuge System.*





## Ruby Lake - Rich In Nevada History

Ruby Valley is rich in history. Evidence of prehistoric people who roamed throughout northeastern Nevada can be found all along the west side of the refuge. Clean water supplied by numerous springs and abundant food resources, which included game animals, waterfowl, seeds, nuts, and roots made the mountain-marsh interface very attractive to these early inhabitants.

In 1859 Captain J.H. Simpson explored the valley as an alternative route to the west coast. His account provides a first-hand glimpse of the area. Simpson notes:

*“Large numbers of Sho-sho-nees winter in Ruby Valley, on account of its being warmer than the other valleys around. One of the mail party represents that as many as 1500 must have staid here last winter. At present time they are scattered, for purposes of hunting.”*

Historic markers identify the Hastings Cutoff Trail which passes through the refuge and continues west by way of Overland Pass — the same route followed by the ill-fated Donner Party.

Ruby Valley was also an important stop on the East-West Pony Express route. The log building that served as the Pony Express Station now stands at the Northeastern Nevada Museum in Elko, Nevada. Ruby Valley was also the home station for the Overland Mail Route and from 1862 to 1869 housed the Fort Ruby Military post, constructed to protect the Overland Mail route from Paiute Indian raiders.

In 1880, Pennsylvanian Jacob Bressman, his daughter Deby and Deby's husband, Lew Benson sold their freight hauling business in nearby Eureka County. They bought cattle, built a cabin and settled in the Ruby Valley. Their cabin and Jacob's grave site, located on the refuge 1.5 miles north of headquarters, have been preserved and stand as a tribute to these early pioneers.

*Bressman cabin;  
Maverick Springs Range  
in the background (USFWS)*





## Wildlife in the Marsh

Wetlands are rare in the Great Basin high desert. A mosaic of open water, dense stands of bulrush, and small islands, the Ruby Marsh is critical to the existence of many species of wildlife. The islands and bulrush provide nesting sites for waterfowl, marsh bird and songbird species. Submerged marsh plants growing in open water areas provide feeding sites for birds. Muskrats, which also make their home in the marsh, feed on marsh vegetation and use bulrush to build lodges.



## Meadows and grasslands

Transition areas between marsh and upland habitats are dominated by sedges, rushes, grasses and forbs. Meadows and grasslands are important to migratory birds for feeding and nesting. Grasslands contain a different complex of vegetation than meadows because grassland soils are drier. Vegetation provides nesting cover for waterfowl and songbirds. These areas also support large populations of small mammals which are an important food source for birds of prey.

*Above: At the marsh's edge (USFWS)*

*Opposite: Shrub-steppe habitat (USFWS)*

*Right: North Marsh  
(©Stephen Ingram)  
Below: Prickly poppy  
(USFWS)*



Over time vegetation in meadows and grasslands becomes heavily matted and nesting habitat is lost. Prescribed fire is used to remove matted vegetation which restores nesting habitat. Cattle grazing and haying are used as habitat management tools to provide feeding areas for birds.



## Sagebrush dominates the shrub-steppe

Shrub-steppe upland habitat dominates the dryer sites on the refuge. Sagebrush is the principal shrub species on the west side of the marsh and greasewood dominates the east side. Great Basin wild rye, a prevalent grass species, is abundant in the shrub-steppe and grassland plant communities. Shrub-steppe habitat is used by many resident and migratory bird species as well as mammals and reptiles native to the Great Basin. Migratory and resident bird species use shrub-steppe areas for feeding and for nesting.

*Birds*

Over 220 species of birds regularly visit the refuge (see refuge wildlife checklist). Providing nesting habitat for migratory birds is the primary purpose of the refuge and waterfowl are the most conspicuous breeders. Canvasback and redhead ducks, among other waterfowl species, reproduce here. The South Marsh provides some of the best nesting habitat for these species west of the Mississippi River. The once-endangered trumpeter swan, originally transplanted between 1947 and 1958 from Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Montana, is also found at Ruby Lake Refuge. Several pairs nest and raise young each year and 40 or more birds may winter here.



In all, 15 species of waterfowl nest on this refuge as well as a variety of other water-dependent birds such as coots, grebes, sandhill cranes, great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, white-faced ibis, black-necked stilts, avocets, yellow-headed blackbirds, common yellowthroats, and marsh wrens.



Bald eagles, golden eagles and several other raptors, including American kestrels and red-tailed hawks are present at various times of the year. Numerous songbirds use the riparian habitat near refuge headquarters along Cave Creek and several first occurrence records for Nevada have been documented. Sage grouse nest in the shrub steppe areas and forage in meadows and grasslands.



*Above:*  
American avocet;  
Female canvasback  
with brood  
(©Clair Kofoed)

*Right:*  
White-faced ibis  
(©Clair Kofoed);  
Male canvasback  
(©Gary Kramer)



### *Fish*

Seven species of fish inhabit Ruby Lake Refuge waters. Largemouth bass, stocked in 1932, successfully reproduce here. Rainbow, eastern brook, and brown trout are stocked annually by Nevada Division of Wildlife, with occasional stockings of cutthroat trout. The trout and bass provide some of the best fishing in Nevada. The relict dace is the only native species of fish on the refuge and is present in only a few other basins in northeastern Nevada. A small number of Lahonton speckled dace remain from a transplant made in 1950.



*Pronghorn family*  
USFWS

### *Mammals*

Mule deer and coyotes are the most frequently seen large mammals. Mule deer are often observed in winter as they move from the foothills to feed and water on the refuge. Coyotes are common residents throughout the year and can often be heard at dusk and just before dawn. Pronghorn antelope use the refuge in the summer. Bobcats are nocturnal visitors and seldom seen. Muskrats are abundant in the marsh and help keep dense stands of bulrush open and more attractive to waterfowl. Their houses and feeding platforms provide resting and nesting sites for waterfowl and marsh-dwelling birds.



Numerous species of small mammals inhabit the refuge including pocket gophers and pocket mice, kangaroo mice and rats, voles and many other species of rodents. Pygmy rabbits and mountain cottontails live here but the most common rabbit is the black-tailed jackrabbit. These small mammals provide food for numerous predators from weasels, badgers and coyotes to hawks, owls and eagles.



### *Reptiles and Amphibians*

During the summer months, Great Basin rattlesnakes and gopher snakes are often seen crossing the roads. Garter snakes are most often found near the marsh. The leopard frog is the only amphibian found on the refuge.

*Above: Least chipmunk (USFWS);  
Badger (©John C. Kerkering);  
Gopher snake (USFWS );  
Cottontail rabbit in winter (USFWS)*

## Enjoying the Refuge

### Location

Ruby Lake Refuge is located in the south Ruby Valley, 65 miles southeast of Elko and 100 miles northwest of Ely in northeastern Nevada.



### Activities



The refuge is open year-round for wildlife observation, fishing, birding and photography. An auto tour route, which follows interior levees through the marsh, provides excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. Fishing is the most popular recreational activity on the refuge. Trout and largemouth bass provide anglers with some of the best fishing in northeast Nevada.



Above: Trumpeter swans (©Clair Kofoed)  
Opposite: Outing on the marsh (USFWS)

### Hours

The refuge is open to the public from 1 hour before sunrise until 2 hours after sunset.

### Wildlife Viewing



The best time to observe waterfowl and their young is from May through July. Nesting and migrating songbirds are best observed during May and June. September and October bring concentrations of up to 25,000 waterfowl and coots.

### Fishing



Trout fishing is best in early spring, fall and winter. Bass fishing peaks in summer.



### Camping



Camp sites are available at the U.S. Forest Service South Ruby Campground, 1.5 miles south of refuge headquarters. For reservations, call 1-877-444-6777. Primitive camping is allowed on Forest Service land 300 feet west of County Road 767 and on BLM land east of the refuge. Camping is not permitted on the refuge.

### Restrooms



Restrooms are located at the Main and Narciss Boat Landings, on Brown Dike, near Bressman Cabin and at refuge headquarters. All are accessible to mobility impaired visitors.

### Lodging

Accommodations are available in Elko, Wells and Ely.



## Roads



Visitors must travel 23 to 35 miles of gravel road to reach the refuge from any direction. Harrison Pass, a steep, rough, and winding road is not passable in winter and is never recommended for large trailers or motor homes. Visitors should check with refuge headquarters about road conditions, especially from November through May.

## Services

A pay phone is located at Shanty Town. Fuel and basic groceries are usually available in Ruby Valley. State hunting and fishing licenses are NOT available in Ruby Valley. Contact the refuge headquarters for current information. Phone 775/779 2237.

## Vehicles



Vehicles are permitted only on designated refuge roads. ATVs and snowmobiles are not permitted on the refuge.

## Pets



Pets are allowed if on a leash or under close control.

## Firearms



Firearms may be transported through the refuge in vehicles ONLY when unloaded and cased, or dismantled. Shotguns are permitted in designated hunting areas during the waterfowl season.

## Prohibited Activities

Littering, fires, cleaning or filleting fish, water skiing, jet skiing, swimming, fireworks, and collecting plants, animals and objects of antiquity, including Native American artifacts, are prohibited. NO BOATS are allowed from January 1 to June 15.

## Accidents

Report all accidents and injuries occurring on the refuge to the refuge headquarters. Phone 775/779 2237.

Above: Milkweed blooms (USFWS)

Background: Low sagebrush scrub with ragweed and paintbrush (©Stephen Ingram)

## Signs Protect Visitors, Wildlife & Habitats



Entry permitted only on refuge access roads.



Designates public access routes through the refuge. Roads are open to vehicles, bicycles and foot traffic only.



The area behind this sign is open to hunting waterfowl, coots, and snipe as permitted by refuge regulations.



This area is closed to all entry. No fishing, hunting, or sight-seeing is permitted. No roads or trails are open to the public.



This area is closed to all motor vehicles and bicycles.



Identifies portions of the Collection Ditch open to fishing. Only artificial lures and flies may be used here.

For information on hunting, fishing, and boating regulations, refer to the refuge recreation brochure available at refuge headquarters and area Nevada Division of Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and Chamber of Commerce offices.



Harrison Pass Road

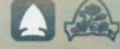
Refuge Headquarters to Elko via Harrison Pass, 65 miles; north to Wells, 78 miles.

County Road

North Marsh

Collection Ditch

Bressman Cabin

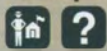


CCC Dike

Long Dike Access Road

East Marsh

Refuge Headquarters



Long Dike

Gallagher State Fish Hatchery



U.S. Forest Service Campground



Shanty Town

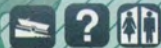
Brown Dike

Gravel Pit Pond

South Marsh

BOUNDARY

Main Boat Landing



North County Line Pond

County Line Pond

Pond

Elko Co.

Y Pond

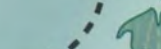
White Pine Co.

Willow Pond

Hidden Springs Pond

Ramires Pond

Marked Boating Channel



REFUGE

Refuge Headquarters to Ely, 96 miles.

Narciss Boat Landing

Fort Ruby Ranch

0 Miles 2

0 Kilometers 2



Above: Male ruddy duck (©Clair Kofoed)  
Background: Ruby Mountains at sunrise (©Stephen Ingram)



Observing wildlife in the North Marsh (©Stephen Ingram)

## Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge

### Map Legend

- Refuge Boundary
- County Road
- Access Road
- Auto Tour Road
- Dike Fishing Only
- Hunting Area
- Wading and Float Tube Area
- Refuge Office
- Information
- Boat Ramp
- Campground
- Restrooms
- Historic Site