

THE STATUS OF THE FRANKLIN'S GULL IN IDAHO

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Observations of Franklin's Gulls (*Larus pipixcan*) in Idaho have been limited. This paper summarizes recent published and unpublished records, and shows that this gull has increased in the state. Franklin's Gull was first recorded in Idaho at Minidoka Dam, Snake River, on 28 July 1910 by Stanley Jewett (Slipp 1942). Through the early 1970s it was recorded from several wetlands in southeastern Idaho, but was known to breed only at Gray's Lake, Caribou Co., site of a large colony, and at Lake Walcott, Minidoka Co., where about 1000 pairs nested (Burleigh 1972). One bird collected near Lewiston, Nez Perce Co., and two collected near Meridian, Ada Co., furnished the only records outside of southeastern Idaho (Burleigh 1972).

The Franklin's Gull is now a more widespread and abundant breeder in Idaho. Liven Peterson (unpubl. data) found 300 pairs nesting at Lake Walcott in 1976, although this colony was probably inactive in 1984 (Charles Trost pers. obs.). At Gray's Lake from 1971 to 1973 over 15,000 pairs were estimated to be nesting, each year producing 13,000 to 15,000 young [*American Birds* (AB) 25:885, 1971; 26:789, 1972; 27:899, 1973], and 15,000 pairs were estimated to be nesting here in 1976 (L. Peterson unpubl. data). Large numbers nested at Gray's Lake in the 1980s (Steve Bouffard pers. comm.), with an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 pairs in 1984 (Eugene Barney unpubl. data). At Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Bear Lake Co., breeding pairs increased from several hundred in 1976 (L. Peterson unpubl. data), to between 1500 and 10,000 from 1979 to 1986 (Gary Deutscher pers. comm.). At Market Lake Wildlife Management Area, Jefferson Co., 50 pairs nested in 1973 (L. Peterson unpubl. data), and 190–210 pairs suffered nest failure in 1984 (C. Trost unpubl. data). Sporadic nesting has also occurred at North Lake Wildlife Management Area, Jefferson Co. (L. Peterson unpubl. data), with 160 nests estimated in 1984 (C. Trost unpubl. data). The "suspected nesting" at American Falls Reservoir, Power Co., in 1985 (AB 39:940, 1985) was not supported by further observations (C. Trost pers. comm.).

There are now many more records of non-breeding Franklin's Gulls from Idaho. In northern and central Idaho Franklin's Gulls have been seen in spring and summer at Kootenai NWR, Boundary Co. (AB 26:785, 1972; 34:798, 1980; 39:940 1985), Lewiston, Nez Perce Co. (Weber 1981, AB 42:1319, 1988), Salmon, Lemhi Co. (AB 40:500, 1986), Coeur d'Alene Lake, Kootenai Co. (AB 43:512, 1989), Cascade Reservoir, Valley Co. (AB 33:882, 1979), and the Taylor Ranch Research Station in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness, Idaho Co. (AB 31:1164, 1977). This species is less frequent in these parts of the state in fall, but it has been recorded at Kootenai NWR (AB 41:120, 1987), Coeur d'Alene Lake (AB 38:226, 1984), and Sandpoint, Bonner Co. (AB 39:80, 1986). Records from southwestern Idaho have come from Lake Lowell and Dry Lake, Canyon Co. (AB 36:200, 1982; AB 37:893, 1983; pers. obs. in 1989 and 1990), Mountain Home Reservoir, Elmore Co. (AB 37:893, 1983), along the Snake River in Ada and Canyon counties (G. Kaltenecker pers. comm.), and Hubbard Reservoir, Ada Co. (AB 38:226, 38:938, 1984).

There are numerous records of Franklin's Gulls in southeastern Idaho away from the known breeding colonies listed above. A particularly important concentration has been at American Falls Reservoir, where I have observed birds throughout the 1980s from late July through August. The annual peak has usually been between 550 to 2500 birds, but 5500 individuals were present on 5 August 1987. Birds at American Falls Reservoir were roosting, feeding in the shallow water of the reservoir, or hawking insects in the evening.

NOTES

These data indicate that Franklin's Gull has very probably increased in Idaho during historical times. The only early ornithologists in southeastern Idaho (Merriam 1873, 1891, Rust 1917) failed to record it, but did not visit several of the known nesting sites. Ryser (1985) noted that 19th-century ornithologists failed to record it in the Great Basin, where there are now several expanding breeding colonies. At Malheur NWR in southeastern Oregon this species has increased almost continuously since first being recorded in the 1940s (Littlefield and Thompson 1981, Littlefield 1990). The increases in Idaho thus appear to be part of an increase throughout much of the Intermountain West, and several other areas may be colonized in the future.

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