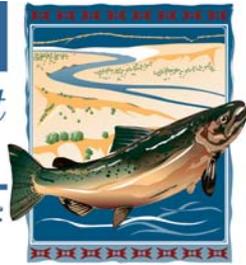


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*Hanford Reach National Monument
Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge*

... protecting the last of the free-flowing Columbia River.



June 1, 2006

Columbia Basin Refuges Complete Second Year of Long-billed Curlew Monitoring Surveys



Long-billed Curlew

Photo: USFWS

Annual Long-billed Curlew surveys were continued during 2006 on the Hanford Reach National Monument/Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge (HRNM) and the Mid-Columbia River Refuges (MCNWR). The surveys are intended to establish base-line data for this species. The Long-billed Curlew is categorized as “highly imperiled” in the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan due in part to historic and current population declines, and is a Focal Species of Concern for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Migratory Birds and nationally throughout Bird Conservation Region 9 (Great Basin).

Long-billed Curlews nest in both shrub steppe habitat, characterized by native grasses with scattered shrubs, and in formerly disturbed areas (i.e. old agricultural fields) often dominated by cheatgrass. Protecting and managing breeding habitat for this species is identified as a high priority within the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP's) for both the Monument and the Refuges. The surveys are conducted in the early spring when Long-billed Curlews are most “detectable” as they perform their aerial territorial displays. The birds become much more secretive once nesting begins.

Surveys are complete, although analysis has not yet been conducted to determine local breeding population estimates. For HRNM, a total of 58 long-billed curlews were detected. For MCNWR, a total of 84 Long-billed curlews were detected with 79 on Umatilla Refuge and 5 on McNary Refuge. These were much greater numbers than were detected in 2005. The detections increased 4 fold on the Monument and nearly doubled on the Mid-Columbia Refuges. This may have been due to normal precipitation levels this year, compared to severe drought conditions last year. Further analysis and future monitoring surveys will determine if these numbers are cause for concern or if these are expected numbers for this species based on available habitat. Continuing these surveys annually will help to define long-billed curlew abundance and trends on refuges in SE Washington and NE Oregon, thus benefitting future management and conservation of this species.



Wildlife Biologist Heidi Newsome (left) and Biology Technician Jennifer Meisel scan the shrub-steppe for the Long-billed Curlew

Photo: Kevin Goldie/USFWS