

Interim Consultation Guidance for Western Yellow-Billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)

Prepared by Emily Teachout with input from Larry Salata. Last updated by Emily Teachout: 4/14/2015

Note: For detailed information on life history and habitat use, see the Proposed Rule dated October 3, 2013 (FR 78, No. 192). The final rule references the Proposed Rule on these topics.

Occurrence in Washington

Historically, the yellow-billed cuckoo was locally common in Washington, occurring on both sides of the Cascade Mountains and throughout the Puget lowlands. The last confirmed breeding records are from the 1930's. Recently, incidental sightings have occurred throughout the state, and the possibility of a vestigial breeding population exists (Wahl et al. 2005, p. 210). There have been a few exploratory surveys done (in Okanogan, Yakima, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties) but no comprehensive, protocol surveys have been conducted in the state. Available data suggest that if yellow-billed cuckoos still breed in Washington, their numbers are extremely low, with pairs numbering in the single digits (FR 78, No. 192, p. 61635). While breeding has not been confirmed, recent observations indicate that western yellow-billed cuckoos occasionally occur in Washington and the possibility of breeding in the state cannot be ruled out (FR 79, No. 192 p, 60014).

Since 1990 there have been 13 sightings in Washington. The most recent was in 2012, on the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge. Of these 13 sightings, 11 were east of the cascades and two were in the Puget lowlands. These sightings were primarily incidental, and made by recreational bird watchers. Some occurred in riparian areas, and some occurred in uplands or developed areas.

WFWO position: Occurrence in Washington is possible, though, very low numbers are expected. Breeding in Washington is possible, though unconfirmed. The species can be found on both sides of the Cascade Mountains in suitable nesting habitat, as well as under a wide array of migratory and foraging habitat conditions. Based on the limited available data there are no clear patterns of occurrence. As such, potential occurrence in any particular county or area cannot be ruled out at this time.

Timing of Migration

Cuckoos generally arrive on breeding grounds in mid-June (FR 78, No. 192, p. 61632). Most have left breeding grounds by mid-September (Gaines and Laymon 1984, pp. 53-58 in FR 78, No. 192, p. 61632). Migration timing is similar throughout the range of the western DPS (Hughes 1999, p. 5 in FR 78, No. 192, p. 61632).

WFWO position: Cuckoo occurrence in Washington is expected between mid-June and mid-September.

Breeding Season

The cuckoo breeding season varies regionally with availability of preferred food. Nesting peaks mid-June through August (FR 78, No. 192, p. 61632). Nesting continues through August, and up to three broods may be

raised if there is sufficient prey base (Laymon et al. 1997, p. 11; Halterman 2009, p. 77 in FR 78, No. 192, p. 61632).

WFWO position: In Washington, if breeding occurs, we expect it to take place between mid-June and mid-September.

Breeding Habitat

The western yellow-billed cuckoo nests almost exclusively in low to moderate elevation riparian woodlands that are 50 acres or larger (FR 78, No. 192, p. 61633). At a landscape level, the amount of cottonwood/willow-dominated vegetation and width of riparian habitat influences distribution and abundance (Gaines and Laymon 1984, p. 76 in FR 78, No. 192, p. 61633). In California, yellow-billed cuckoos are most likely to be found in patches larger than 200 acres (FR 78, No. 192, p. 61633).

WFWO position: Suitable breeding habitat for the cuckoo is defined as patches of mature willow and cottonwood riparian vegetation that are >50 acres in size.

Foraging and Migrating Habitat

Little is known about the foraging and migrating habitat of yellow-billed cuckoo. A high foliage volume of cottonwoods appeared important for foraging in a study done along the Colorado River (Rosenburg et al. 1991, pp. 203-204 in FR 78, No. 192, p. 61633).

Yellow-billed cuckoos are found in a variety of vegetation types during migration, including coastal scrub, secondary growth woodland, hedgerows, humid lowland forests, and forest edges from sea level to 8,125 ft (Hughes 1999, pp. 6-7 in FR 78, No. 192, p. 61633). They may also use smaller riparian patches than those in which they typically nest (FR 78, No. 192, p. 61632).

WFWO position: Western yellow-billed cuckoos use a wide array of migratory and foraging habitat types.

Surveying for Nesting Yellow-billed Cuckoo

The lead office (Sacramento – R/8) recommends the use of Halterman et al. (2011) as the most effective survey protocol. The survey approach uses auditory playback and requires four surveys between mid-June to mid-August. Surveyors must have applicable state and federal permits. The Service is currently developing a programmatic Biological Opinion on the issuance of recovery permits for surveys, but it will only apply in Region 8. There is currently no existing Biological Opinion that address recovery permits for yellow-billed cuckoo surveys in Region 1.

WFWO position: To-date, there has not been demand for recovery permits for yellow-billed cuckoos in Washington. Should the need arise, staff should coordinate with either Emily Teachout or Jeff Chan to identify an approach for obtaining the necessary recovery permits.

Consultation Strategy

- The FWS needs to develop a standardized survey protocol for the cuckoo rangewide.

- The FWS should advise/recommend to Federal agencies that they conduct protocol-based surveys for cuckoos as part of their project planning process, and independently, per the requirements of ESA section 7(a)(1).
- The FWS needs to initiate preparation of a recovery plan for the cuckoo. In the interim, in Washington State, an assessment to identify potentially important patches of cuckoo habitat should be completed. Based on the results of that assessment, the FWS should advise Federal agencies to plan accordingly to protect, maintain, restore, or enhance these areas.
- In Washington State, the FWS should recommend that Federal agencies avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse effects of their actions on the cuckoo and its habitat.
- In Washington State, the FWS should track the effects of Federal and non-Federal actions on known or potential cuckoo habitat.

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