

# USACE Natural Resource Management

## Migratory Birds



### Yellow-billed Cuckoo (Western DPS) | FAST FACTS

**REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS:** The Yellow-billed Cuckoo once bred throughout most of North America. Unfortunately, in the last 50 years the Rocky Mountain population has undergone a substantial decline. A petition to list the Yellow-billed Cuckoo Western U.S. Distinct Population Segment (DPS) was recognized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001. However, it remained a candidate species until 2014 when the DPS was officially listed as threatened.

According to USFWS, the primary reason for population decline is the loss of riparian habitat stemming from water flow management, stream channelization, bank stabilization, conversion to agricultural uses, and livestock grazing. Breeding habitat has also been degraded as a result of groundwater pumping and invasive plants, particularly tamarisk.

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** When the western DPS was listed in 2014, it became apparent how little was known about the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Consequently, a great deal of effort was put into researching various aspects of its life history and ecology so that conservation efforts could be effective.

**HABITAT NEEDS:** The Yellow-billed Cuckoo winters in South America, but breeds in North America. During the breeding season this species occupies a variety of habitats including open woodland, parks, and deciduous riparian woodland.

- Cottonwoods and willows provide important foraging habitat. Planting these trees supports cuckoo prey species such as katydids.
- Large blocks of riparian habitat is needed for breeding. Maintaining, restoring, and/or improving riparian habitat is vital.
- Dense understory foliage appears to be a major factor in nest site selection.
- Limiting livestock grazing in riparian areas, managing non-native vegetation, restoring natural patterns of water flow (i.e. periodic flooding), and limiting the use of pesticides in riparian areas have all shown to have positive impacts on cuckoos.

**Size:** This is a medium-sized bird of roughly 12 inches in length and 2 ounces in weight. (USFWS)

**Color:** Upper bodies are brown and undersides are white. Wings have rusty colored primary flight feathers. This bird has a black face mask and yellow eye rings. The bill is mostly yellow, thick, slightly down curved, and nearly as long as the head. Species' tail, when viewed from below, has wide white bands mixed with narrower black bands.

*Photo Credit: USFWS*

*Natural Resource Management (NRM)*

*This fact sheet has been prepared as an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This online publication is produced to provide its readers information about best management practices related to special status species. Editorial views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army. Mention of specific vendors does not constitute endorsement by the Department of the Army or any element thereof.*



August 2020

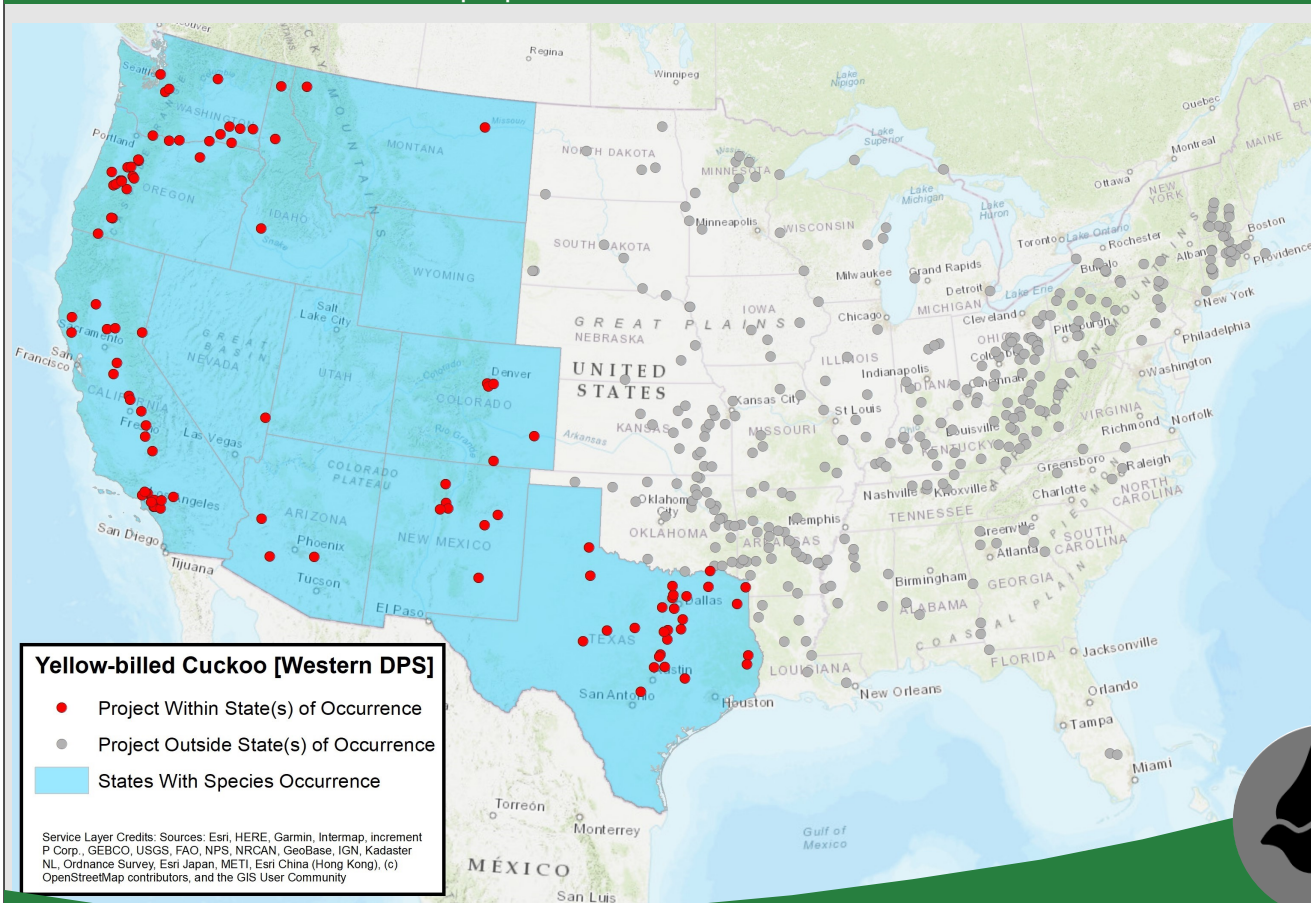
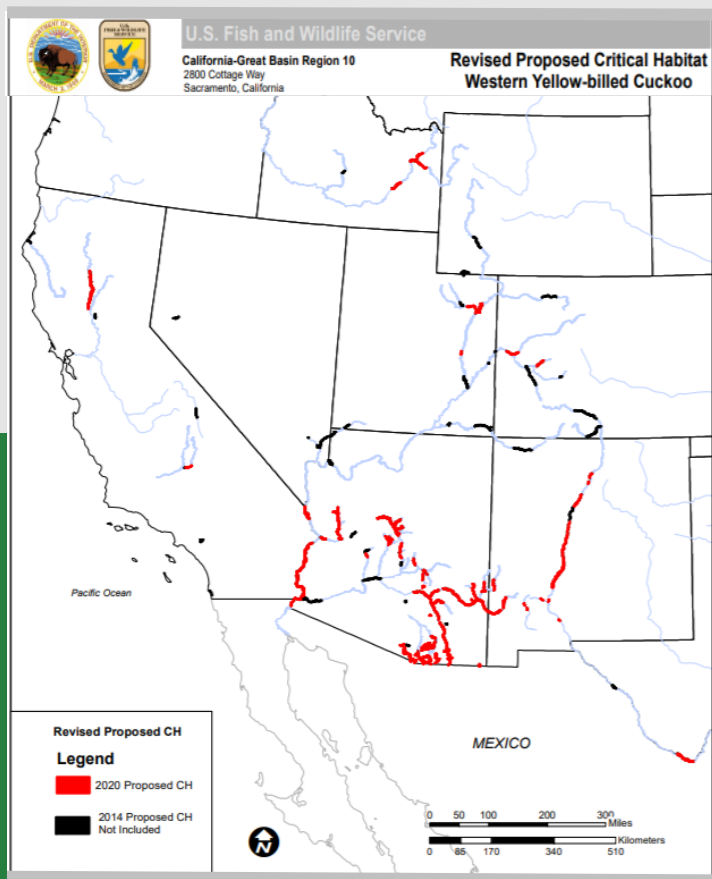
**USACE ROLE:** Since 2006, the USACE has expended \$1,715,607 on efforts related to the Yellow-billed Cuckoo western DPS. Of that sum, \$10,928 was expended on a combination of in-house and external research. \$511,248 has been put toward inventorying, surveying, and monitoring the species. Another \$15,200 was put toward species' protection including avoidance measures during the execution of new projects. (ERDC– USACE Threatened and Endangered Species Costs)

Map Right: Revised Proposed Critical Habitat for the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo—USFWS.

### WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:

**1** Currently, only one NRM project has potential occurrence of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo on project lands. USACE works closely with the USFWS under Section 7(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act to ensure that USACE actions do not jeopardize this species.

**2** A petition to delist the Western DPS was formally recognized by the USFWS in 2018. A species status assessment is underway and results are expected sometime in 2020. Additionally, USFWS proposed revision of the 2014 critical habitat proposal for the western distinct population of the species. The revised proposal designates 493,665 acres of critical habitat across portions of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah, a reduction of 56,184 acres from the 2014 proposal.



Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ORISE Fellowship, Institute for Water Resources

# Migratory Birds

