



## NIOBARARA NATIONAL SCENIC RIVER 2015 RESOURCE BRIEF

### LANDBIRD MONITORING

**Overview:** The Niobrara National Scenic River (NSR) is a crossroads where many animal and plant species coexist. This area is unique in that six major ecosystems converge including northern boreal forest, western forest, eastern deciduous forest, tallgrass prairie, mixed-grass prairie, and shortgrass prairie. The central reach of the Niobrara River serves as an east-west avian corridor. As a result, the Niobrara Valley supports an exceptional biological diversity of birds.

The Northern Great Plains Inventory and Monitoring Network developed a bird monitoring protocol jointly with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (formerly Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory). A panel design where grids are sampled on a rotation schedule was developed to facilitate complete coverage of the park. This research is a long-term effort to monitor species trends and densities.

The 2015 breeding season was the second

year of surveys at Niobrara NSR. The Bird Conservancy surveyed 13 grids and 136 points during June and July. A total of 2,610 birds were detected representing 78 species.

**Highlights:** The most common species detected were the Mourning Dove, House Wren, Field Sparrow, American Crow, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, and Yellow-breasted Chat. The only non-native species observed was the European Starling.

Twenty-five species found along the Niobrara NSR have been identified as species of concern (see back page). One of these species, the Grasshopper Sparrow, was the seventh-most commonly detected species at Niobrara. According to the 2014 State of the Birds Report, the Grasshopper Sparrow is listed as a Common Bird in Steep Decline. Habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation are the leading causes of its decline.

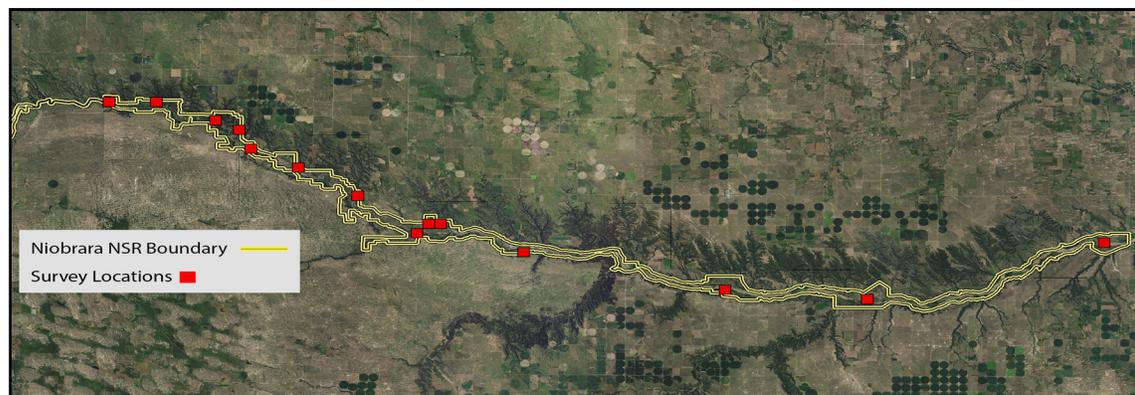


Gerhard Hoffman

Top: Canoers on the Niobrara NSR

Above Left: The Grasshopper Sparrow, a Nebraska priority species, was detected frequently in 2015.

Right: Survey locations during the 2015 field season





| Common Name                | 2014 | 2015 | Common Name                   | 2014 | 2015 |
|----------------------------|------|------|-------------------------------|------|------|
| American Avocet            | 2    | 0    | Great Blue Heron              | 3    | 3    |
| American Crow              | 81   | 136  | Great Crested Flycatcher      | 57   | 67   |
| American Goldfinch         | 80   | 85   | Great Horned Owl              | 0    | 1    |
| American Kestrel           | 2    | 12   | Hairy Woodpecker              | 9    | 13   |
| American Redstart          | 28   | 22   | <b>Horned Lark</b>            | 3    | 3    |
| American Robin             | 42   | 39   | House Wren                    | 77   | 155  |
| American White Pelican     | 1    | 0    | Indigo Bunting                | 58   | 57   |
| <b>Bald Eagle</b>          | 3    | 2    | Killdeer                      | 4    | 3    |
| <b>Baltimore Oriole</b>    | 5    | 1    | <b>Lark Sparrow</b>           | 70   | 95   |
| <b>Bank Swallow</b>        | 2    | 3    | Lazuli Bunting                | 0    | 2    |
| Barn Swallow               | 10   | 10   | Mourning Dove                 | 175  | 200  |
| <b>Bell's Vireo</b>        | 35   | 26   | <b>Northern Bobwhite</b>      | 26   | 25   |
| <b>Belted Kingfisher</b>   | 1    | 3    | Northern Cardinal             | 27   | 38   |
| Black-and-white Warbler    | 23   | 9    | Northern Flicker              | 2    | 1    |
| <b>Black-billed Cuckoo</b> | 3    | 3    | Northern Rough-winged Swallow | 38   | 39   |
| Black-capped Chickadee     | 50   | 50   | Orchard Oriole                | 26   | 38   |
| Black-headed Grosbeak      | 14   | 5    | Ovenbird                      | 47   | 41   |
| Blue Grosbeak              | 31   | 28   | <b>Prairie Falcon</b>         | 0    | 1    |
| Blue Jay                   | 18   | 22   | <b>Red Crossbill</b>          | 3    | 0    |
| Blue-gray Gnatcatcher      | 4    | 4    | Red-bellied Woodpecker        | 5    | 3    |
| Blue-winged Teal           | 1    | 0    | Red-breasted Nuthatch         | 5    | 7    |
| <b>Bobolink</b>            | 0    | 3    | Red-eyed Vireo                | 93   | 77   |
| Brewer's Blackbird         | 0    | 4    | Red-headed Woodpecker         | 17   | 34   |
| Brown Creeper              | 1    | 2    | Red-tailed Hawk               | 2    | 8    |
| <b>Brown Thrasher</b>      | 7    | 5    | Red-winged Blackbird          | 33   | 37   |
| Brown-headed Cowbird       | 121  | 91   | Scarlet Tanager               | 0    | 5    |
| <b>Bullock's Oriole</b>    | 0    | 1    | <b>Sharp-tailed Grouse</b>    | 0    | 2    |
| Canada Goose               | 11   | 1    | Song Sparrow                  | 4    | 2    |
| Cedar Waxwing              | 20   | 30   | Spotted Sandpiper             | 1    | 0    |
| <b>Chimney Swift</b>       | 0    | 1    | Spotted Towhee                | 113  | 121  |
| Chipping Sparrow           | 103  | 112  | Tree Swallow                  | 7    | 4    |
| Common Grackle             | 29   | 21   | Turkey Vulture                | 22   | 11   |
| <b>Common Nighthawk</b>    | 3    | 9    | <b>Upland Sandpiper</b>       | 11   | 52   |
| Common Yellowthroat        | 58   | 30   | Virginia Rail                 | 1    | 0    |
| Cooper's Hawk              | 1    | 1    | Warbling Vireo                | 6    | 3    |
| <b>Dickcissel</b>          | 161  | 62   | Western Kingbird              | 0    | 2    |
| Downy Woodpecker           | 15   | 23   | <b>Western Meadowlark</b>     | 23   | 52   |
| Eastern Bluebird           | 23   | 47   | Western Wood-Pewee            | 5    | 5    |
| <b>Eastern Kingbird</b>    | 34   | 34   | White-breasted Nuthatch       | 28   | 39   |
| Eastern Phoebe             | 0    | 3    | <b>Wild Turkey</b>            | 14   | 7    |
| Eastern Wood-Pewee         | 18   | 16   | Yellow Warbler                | 32   | 18   |
| European Starling          | 3    | 5    | <b>Yellow-billed Cuckoo</b>   | 2    | 4    |
| <b>Field Sparrow</b>       | 123  | 137  | Yellow-breasted Chat          | 67   | 105  |
| <b>Grasshopper Sparrow</b> | 79   | 110  | Yellow-headed Blackbird       | 0    | 1    |
| Gray Catbird               | 4    | 1    |                               |      |      |

Left: Number of detections for each bird species at Niobrara NSR in 2014 and 2015

**\*Species of Importance:**  
Determined by Partners in Flight priority species list and the state of Nebraska priority list.

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