



THE AMERICAN DIPPER IN THE BLACK HILLS

“Find a fall or cascade, or rushing rapid, anywhere upon a clear stream, and there you will surely find its complementary ouzel, flitting about in the spring, dining in the foaming eddies, whirling like a leaf among the foam-bells; ever vigorous and enthusiastic, yet self-contained, and neither seeking nor shunning your company...He is the mountain stream’s own darling, the hummingbird of blooming waters, loving rocky ripple slopes and sheets of foam as a bee loves flowers, and a lark loves sunshine and meadows.” – *John Muir, The Mountains of California 1894*

• THE AMERICAN DIPPER

Also called the water ouzel, the American dipper is a bird species that inhabits mountain streams of western North America. The dipper has been described as the only true aquatic songbird and is most known for its odd dipping behavior, as well as its ability to live among rapids and cascades. The dipper preys upon aquatic insects, like mayflies and caddisflies, and depends upon permanent, clean, cold, and swift stream habitat that remains unfrozen in winter time.



• THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DIPPER

The dipper is extremely sensitive to stream degradation and pollution, and is an important indicator of water quality. Healthy dipper populations indicate healthy stream ecosystems, a relationship that provides an invaluable window into the health of our environment. The health of dipper populations can signal impending environmental problems and aid in the prevention of human illness and costly environmental cleanup.

• THE DIPPER IN THE BLACK HILLS

The American dipper is isolated in the Black Hills. The bird historically inhabited several permanent, fast-flowing streams in the Black Hills, including French Creek, Rapid Creek, Spearfish Creek, as well as others. Today, nesting dippers are absent from nearly 86% of their historical range in the Black Hills as a result of stream pollution, streamside habitat degradation, and reduced stream flows. Spearfish Creek is now described as the only stream capable of sustaining dippers.

• THREATS TO THE DIPPER

Domestic livestock grazing, logging, road construction, mining, water diversions, and erratic water flows from Pactola Dam have all degraded the dipper’s habitat and threaten the bird on the Black Hills. Additionally, agencies like the Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation at Pactola Dam, and Department of Environment and Natural Resources are failing to protect the bird and its habitat. The small population size of the dipper also makes the bird more vulnerable to floods, fires, and other impacts.

• THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT AND THE DIPPER

The best available science shows the American dipper population on the Black Hills is threatened with extinction and warrants protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA). Protection of the dipper population on the Black Hills under the ESA is necessary to prevent the extinction of this unique and important population, and to prevent further degradation of stream habitat in the Black Hills. ESA protection will mean the recovery and restoration of the dipper and water quality on the Black Hills.