

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

RED-THROATED LOON

Gavia stellata

Family: GAVIIDAE
B001

Order: GAVIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Most winter in Baja California, but some present in California, mostly as migrants, from October through April. Uncommon to common along the California coast in marine subtidal and in estuarine habitats. Very rare in pelagic waters and on large inland lakes, and along coast in summer. Does not nest in California (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Dives for food in fairly shallow or deep water, often close to surf, to a maximum recorded depth of 21.1 m (70 ft) (Palmer 1962). Eats mainly fish, but also crustaceans, leeches, snails, aquatic insects, other invertebrates, and even moss.

Cover: Rarely comes ashore except when breeding. Commonly dives to escape enemies; may stay submerged up to 90 sec (Palmer 1962). Take-off does not require as much water surface as other loons.

Reproduction: Nests in subarctic and arctic regions, no records in California. Nest sites commonly on shore near water, on an island, or sometimes on water. Small ponds are preferred, but larger lakes or calm rivers also used. Nests found both near the coast and far inland, in both treeless and forested habitats.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: No additional data found.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Nearly entire wintering population migrates to northern breeding grounds, departing April to May and returning October to November.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: According to Palmer (1962), defends a breeding territory, used for courtship, nesting, and sometimes feeding; size not known. In Finland, 30 nests were seen on one island, only a few meters apart. Nonterritorial in winter.

Reproduction: Courtship usually begins in May, on subarctic or arctic breeding grounds. A monogamous, solitary nester with usually 2 eggs per clutch, ranging 1-3, and single-brooded. Incubation 27 days (one instance). Precocial young are tended

and fed by both parents. Age at first flight probably about 2 mo, and probably breed first at 2 yr (Palmer 1962, Terres 1980).

Niche: A few adults and eggs taken for food and other uses by Eskimos (Palmer 1962). Eggs probably taken by predators such as jaegers, gulls, and foxes, as with other loons. On wintering grounds, some mortality by oiling, entanglement in fishing nets, and illegal shooting. In the high arctic, freezing weather may reduce nesting success or prevent breeding because of lack of open water.

REFERENCES

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- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Palmer, R. S., ed. 1962. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 1. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven CT. 567pp.
- Terres, J. K. 1980. The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. A. Knopf, New York. 1100pp.

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