

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

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HORNED GREBE

*Podiceps auritus*

Family: PODICIPEDIDAE  
B007

Order: PODICIPEDIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

From October through April, fairly common to common along the entire California coast in marine subtidal and especially estuarine habitats. Uncommon near the Channel Islands. During migration, found rarely in deep lacustrine habitats near the coast, and at other low elevations. Fewer are present in September and May. Very rare in summer, and does not breed in California (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats a variety of small fish, also crustaceans, and insects (especially in fresh water) (Cogswell 1977). Based on 122 stomachs, eats less than 1% plants, and feathers formed 55% of stomach contents (Palmer 1962). Feathers may help prevent bones, chitin and other hard parts from damaging the intestine. Dives for food, usually in water 1.5-8 m (5-25 ft) deep (Bent 1919). Also feeds from surface and tips up for insects, crustaceans and other foods (Storer 1969).

**Cover:** Often dives to escape danger. Can stay under for 75-180 sec, and can swim up to 150 m (500 ft) in one dive (Bent 1919). Can take wing from small area of water. Rests on water.

**Reproduction:** Does not breed in California. Nesting occurs in the northernmost contiguous United States, Canada, and Alaska. Nests on ponds, marshes with open water, and sheltered parts of lakes and streams, often with little emergent vegetation. Nests usually are built within emergent vegetation, but sometimes are exposed.

**Water:** No additional data found.

**Pattern:** For breeding, prefers some emergent vegetation bordering a pond, lake, or quiet stream.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity, except migration occurs both night and day.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Nearly all of wintering population migrates north to breeding grounds; mostly absent in California May to September.

**Home Range:** No information found.

**Territory:** Apparently defends a breeding territory where most activity takes place until the young are well grown (Palmer 1962). In North Dakota, aggressively defended territory, and if there were more than one pair on a lake or pond, then nests were at least 45 m (150 ft) apart

(Faaborg 1976).

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Begins breeding in May and June. A monogamous, usually solitary nester, but sometimes nests near other pairs. Clutch usually 4-5 eggs, range 3-6. Single-brooded, apparently. Incubation 24-25 days. Precocial young are cared for by both parents when young, but one parent (probably male) leaves after a few weeks; the other stays with the young until they are nearly full grown. Age at independence is unknown. Departs breeding areas in September to October. Apparently breeds at 1 yr (Palmer 1962).

Niche: Sometimes feeds with Bonaparte's gulls (Dusi 1968) and surf scoters (Paulson 1969).

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Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.