

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

---

RED-NECKED GREBE

*Podiceps grisegena*

Family: PODICIPEDIDAE  
B008

Order: PODICIPEDIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: S. Granholm  
Reviewed by: D. Raveling  
Edited by: R. Duke

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The red-necked grebe is a rare to uncommon winter resident, found primarily in central and northern California. It occurs principally on estuarine, and marine subtidal waters, and occasionally in lacustrine habitats. In central and northern California, rare or very uncommon from October to April. In southern California, very rare and irregular November to March, with only 2 records south of Los Angeles Co. Very rare May to September, and does not nest in California. Nests have been found as far south as Upper Klamath Lake, Oregon, however (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats mainly fish, crustaceans, insects (especially in fresh water), also amphibians, worms, and mollusks. In breeding habitat, fish are a minor item, but in California they probably are the most important food. Dives for food, and often forages at, or near, the bottom. As with other grebes, the stomach contains feathers.

**Cover:** Often dives to avoid danger; may remain submerged 1 min or more (Palmer 1962). Rests on water.

**Reproduction:** Does not breed in California, but primarily in northernmost contiguous U.S., Canada, and Alaska. Usually nests within, or on the edge of, emergent vegetation bordering shallow inland lakes, which usually are larger than 4 ha (10 ac). Lakes with nests are found in forested or unforested habitats.

**Water:** No additional data found.

**Pattern:** For breeding, requires some emergent vegetation bordering a shallow lake.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Active yearlong. Reported to feed nocturnally as well as diurnally (Palmer 1962). Also migrates night and day.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Mostly absent from California from May to September, when nearly entire wintering population migrates north to breeding grounds.

**Home Range:** In breeding season, same size as territory.

**Territory:** Each breeding pair usually defends about 68-114 m (225-375 ft) of shoreline and associated waters, where all activities take place (Palmer 1962). Occasionally, pairs nest in groups, and may nest as little as 9 m (30 ft) apart.

Reproduction: Does not breed in California, but some courtship begins in early spring, during migration. Eggs usually laid in May. Monogamous, usually solitary nester, but several pairs may nest near each other. Clutch size is 4-5 eggs, occasionally 3 or 6. Rarely may raise 2 broods. Incubation is 23 days, with precocial young cared for by both parents until quite large (at least to 72 days, and as late as September 1). Evidently first breeds at 2 yr (Palmer 1962).

Niche: No additional data found.

Comments: Many die when forced to alight on land when exhausted, or when blown off course by storms; cannot take flight from land. Some mortality from entanglement in fishing nets.

#### REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1919. Life histories of North American diving birds. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 107. 245pp.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- 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.
- Munro, J. A. 1941. The grebes. Studies of waterfowl in British Columbia. Brit. Col. Prov. Mus., Vancouver. Occas. Pap. No. 3. 71pp.
- Palmer, R. S., ed. 1962. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 1. Yale University Press, New Haven CT. 567pp.
- Terres, J. K. 1980. The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. A. Knopf, New York. 1100pp.

B008

---

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.