

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

PELAGIC CORMORANT

Phalacrocorax pelagicus

Family: PHALACROCORACIDAE

Order: PELECANIFORMES

Class: AVES

B047

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The pelagic cormorant is a fairly common yearlong resident in marine subtidal, and uncommon in marine pelagic, habitats along rocky coasts of mainland and islands south to San Luis Obispo Co. and Santa Barbara Island. Breeds April to August or September on steep rocky cliffs; locally common in large nesting colonies. Along remainder of coast, fairly common September to April and rare or uncommon through summer. Occurs locally in outermost parts of estuaries. During salmon runs, occurs several miles inland along Klamath River, Del Norte Co. (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, DeSante and Ainley 1980, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats mainly small fish, but also crustaceans. Dives from water surface and pursues prey underwater, usually near rocky shores. Prefers to feed off rocky bottom of relatively shallow water (Robertson 1974). Has been caught in nets as deep as 36 m (120 ft); will dive into heavy surf near cliffs and boulders.

Cover: Rests and roosts on steep rocky cliffs and offshore rocks. Can take flight more readily than other cormorants; thus, does not need as long a span of open water.

Reproduction: Nests on precipitous, rocky cliffs of islands or mainland; uses narrower ledges than Brandt's or double-crested cormorants.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Requires steep rocky cliffs for nesting, near dependable food supply.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Most individuals probably are resident near their nesting location, but there is some southward movement after nesting. The population south of San Luis Obispo Co. clearly increases September to April (DeSante and Ainley 1980, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Probably restricted to the immediate nest site, as with other North American cormorants (Palmer 1962).

Reproduction: Breeds from April to August or September; eggs laid mainly May to June.

Monogamous, colonial nester, but has smaller colonies than double crested or Brandt's cormorants. Clutch size usually 3-5, occasionally 6-7; replacement clutches usually 2-3. Number of broods unknown. Incubation reportedly 26 days, by both parents. Altricial young. Ages at first flight, independence, and first breeding unknown (Palmer 1962).

Niche: Gulls and crows are important predators on eggs and chicks (Siegel-Causey and Hunt 1981); predation more likely when adults are frightened from nests. Sometimes are attracted to schools of fish by behavior of gulls, and often drive the gulls away.

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