

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

TUNDRA SWAN

Cygnus columbianus

Family: ANATIDAE
B067

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The tundra swan is a common fall and winter resident in the Central Valley, especially in the Delta region, and is common on the Northeastern Plateau. It prefers lacustrine habitat, wet croplands, pastures, grasslands, and the borders of emergent wetlands. Found less commonly on estuarine and slow-moving riverine waters. Uncommon October to March in coastal lowlands south to Santa Barbara Co. Leaves northeastern California in severe winters when most lakes freeze over (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979). Rare November to February in southern California, mostly occurring from Owens Valley, Inyo Co. to Antelope Valley, Los Angeles Co. (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Major foods are leaves, stems, seeds, and tubers of aquatic and marsh plants, and seeds and young shoots of cultivated grains. Young eat insects and other invertebrates at first. Feeds in shallow water, dipping head or neck into water, or, rarely, tipping up to reach the bottom. Also feeds on land, grubbing in mud for food, and gleans and grazes on agricultural lands.

Cover: Rests and roosts in same habitat used for feeding; rests on banks and shores.

Reproduction: Nests in northern Canada and Alaska. Builds nest platform at, or near, tundra ponds, lakes, slow rivers, and, occasionally, on tidal waters.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: No additional data found.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity, except migration both nocturnal and diurnal.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: The California wintering population migrates to breeding grounds in northern Canada and Alaska, and is absent April to September.

Home Range: In Maryland, commonly flies 16-24 km (10-15 mi) from primary staging areas to feed in grain fields (Bellrose 1976).

Territory: Maintains a breeding territory, but size not reported. In good habitat, several pairs may nest in view of one another, but widely spaced (Palmer 1976).

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Breeding season begins in May or June. Monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch size usually 5, sometimes 3-7. Single-brooded;

incubation 32 days. Precocial young must find own food, but are protected by both parents and remain with them until following spring. Mostly breeds first at 2-3 yr (Palmer 1976, Harrison 1978).

Niche: Nests occasionally destroyed by predators, including gulls and foxes (Bellrose 1976). In most states, including California, not a hunted species. Harvesting of eggs and flightless, molting individuals by native tribes is an important mortality factor on the breeding grounds, as are illegal shooting and lead poisoning in the lower 48 states (Palmer 1976).

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