

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

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GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

*Anser albifrons*

Family: ANATIDAE

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B070

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The greater white-fronted goose is a common winter visitor to the Central Valley of California. It is found in moist and wet grasslands, pastures, croplands, meadows, fresh emergent wetlands, lacustrine habitat and, less commonly, in estuarine and saline (brackish) emergent habitats. In the Central Valley, abundant October to March and fairly common September, April, and early May. In northeastern California, abundant October to November and late February to April, but less common remainder of winter. A few thousand winter at Tule Lake. In interior of southern California, mostly rare, but irregularly common January to March, and most numerous at Salton Sea, though numbers now much reduced there (Cogswell 1977, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1978, 1979, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** In California, feeds mainly in moist or wet fields on seeds and sprouts of cultivated grains and wild grasses. Grazes, gleans, and grubs for food. Occasionally feeds in open waters of emergent wetlands, ponds, or lakes, by tipping for aquatic plant materials. On breeding grounds, eats mainly grasses, sedges, aquatic plants, and berries.

**Cover:** Roosts and loafes mainly on secluded ponds and emergent wetlands (Grinnell and Miller 1944), but also in fields used for feeding, and on lakes.

**Reproduction:** Breeds in subarctic and arctic regions in slightly elevated sites amidst low ground cover, usually farther inland than other geese, sometimes on high, dry terrain, but sometimes near water.

**Water:** Bodies of water, usually ponds and lakes, are required for drinking, and preferred for resting.

**Pattern:** Prefers to feed in moist grasslands, pastures, and croplands, and rest on secluded ponds and emergent wetlands, which need not be adjacent to feeding areas.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, usually diurnal activity, feeding mostly in late morning and afternoon, but during hunting season commonly feeds nocturnally (Cogswell 1977). Migration both diurnal and nocturnal.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** The California wintering population migrates to breeding grounds in western Alaska (Bellrose 1976), and mostly is absent mid-May to August.

Home Range: Wintering individuals in the Central Valley averaged 24-32.5 km from roost to feeding locations (Ackerman et al. 2006). Population range size was 3,367 sq km in 1998-2000 in the Central Valley (Ackerman et al. 2006). Usually nests in low densities, but in good habitat or on islands, pairs may nest within view of one another (Palmer 1976).

Territory: Maintains a breeding territory, but size has not been measured (Palmer 1976).

Reproduction: Does not breed in California. Breeding begins late May or early June. Monogamous, solitary nester, but may nest near other pairs. Clutch size averaged 3.7-5.7 eggs on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (Ely and Raveling 1984). Single-brooded. Incubation 24-26 days. Precocial young are tended by both parents and remain with them until the next season (Bellrose 1976, Harrison 1978). Twenty-five percent breed as 2 year-olds, with 90% breeding at 3 years and older (Schmutz and Ely 1999).

Niche: On the Yukon Delta, the greatest cause of nest loss was predators, mostly jaegers and gulls. Weather probably is a more important factor limiting breeding success (Bellrose 1976). Other predators include foxes, eagles, and snowy owls. As with most ducks and geese, the major mortality factors for adults include hunting, disease, and lead-shot poisoning (Bellrose 1976). Livestock may be important competitors for grass shoots.

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