

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

ROSS' S GOOSE

Chen rossii

Family: ANATIDAE
B072

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The Ross's goose has increased greatly in numbers in recent years (McLandress 1979). Now a locally common fall and winter resident (November to March) of the Central Valley. Preferred habitats include fresh emergent wetlands, adjacent lacustrine waters, and nearby wet croplands, pastures, meadows, and grasslands. In northeastern California, common to abundant on major refuges late October to December and March and April, but rare remainder of winter. Along south end of the Salton Sea, fairly common November to February, and rare in March. On the coastal slope, rare in southern California, and rare and irregular in northern California. Recent studies suggest the population may be 4, or more, times the previous estimates of about 25,000 (McLandress 1979). Most individuals winter in the Central Valley, particularly in the vicinity of Merced National Wildlife Refuge (Bellrose 1976, Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981), and Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge (McLandress 1979).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: In California, the major foods are green shoots and seeds of wild grasses and cultivated grains. On breeding grounds, the diet consists mainly of roots and shoots of grasses and sedges. Resembles the snow goose in feeding habits, but is more of an upland and grazing species (Palmer 1976). Most food is obtained by grubbing, grazing, and gleaning in wet fields.

Cover: Rests at night and mid-day on lakes and ponds. In California, by mid-February, tends to rest near rainwater pools on higher ground than used by snow goose, which commutes to large bodies of water (Palmer 1976).

Reproduction: Breeds in central arctic Canada, usually on islands in tundra lakes; uses nearly flat terrain, preferably with low, woody vegetation interspersed with grassy areas (Palmer 1976).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: In California, prefers to forage in wet, open fields near lakes or ponds for resting.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity. Prefers to feed early and late in day and rest in mid-day. Hunting pressure probably results in nocturnal feeding, as with snow goose.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Wintering population in California migrates to breeding ground in arctic central Canada and is absent April to October.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: Breeding territory, used for nesting and some feeding, is only about 2.4-3.6 m (8-12 ft) in diameter (Palmer 1976).

Reproduction: Breeding season begins early June in arctic Canada. Monogamous, colonial nester. Clutch size usually 3-4; single-brooded, and incubates 21-23 days. Precocial young are tended by both parents, and may remain with them until incubation begins the following yr. First breeds at 2 yr (Palmer 1976, Harrison 1978).

Niche: Hunting is a major source of adult mortality. Many are shot by hunters mistaking them for snow geese (Cogswell 1977). In the Northwest Territories, arctic foxes sometimes killed nesters and often caused nest desertion, but avian nest predation did not affect nesting success (Ryder 1967). Ryder (1967) found no evidence of competition with snow goose for nest sites, but suggested that competition could become a problem if snow goose numbers increased substantially. Livestock may be important competitors for grass in some areas.

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