

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

AMERICAN WIGEON

Anas americana

Family: ANATIDAE

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B087

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Very common October to March, and common September and April in lacustrine and fresh emergent habitats and nearby herbaceous and cropland habitats, in lowlands throughout California, and in the southern mountains. Highest numbers are in Central and Imperial valleys. Uncommon in northern mountains and rare in southern deserts. Uncommon to fairly common along coast in winter, in salt ponds, estuarine waters, and saline emergent wetlands. In northeastern California, very common late August to November, March to April, and through mild winters, and rare May to July, when it nests. Also nests, rarely, in Central Valley south to Merced Co. (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: During nonbreeding season, feeds mainly on leaves and stems of aquatic plants and terrestrial grasses and forbs. In California, often feeds on crops such as lettuce, alfalfa, clover, and young barley. Also eats some seeds and waste grain. In summer, in Northwest Territories, ate considerably more animal food, mainly aquatic insects (Bartonek 1972). Young ducklings in Alberta ate mainly invertebrates, mostly insects, but by 3 wk they were eating predominantly plant foods (Sugden 1973). Forages in shallow water by gleaning surface and subsurface waters, or tipping up. More than other dabblers, it spends much time grazing in fields near water. Also noted for following other species of waterfowl and eating plants dislodged by their feeding activities, and even stealing plants that they bring to the surface (Palmer 1976).

Cover: Typically rests, and possibly roosts at night, well off-shore on extensive open-water, even during wing molt, when most dabblers seek vegetative cover.

Reproduction: Most nest well to the north of California, but the following comments probably apply to California nesting habitat. Nests on ground on upland sites, near lakes or emergent wetland with extensive open-water, and much submerged vegetation. Nests may be from a few m, up to 360 m (400 yd) from water, and often are on islands. The nest usually is well concealed, in grasses, rushes, sedges, brush, or trees, often in heavy woods (Palmer 1976). Broods frequent large open-water areas more than most other *Anas* species.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Prefers to nest in dense ground cover, in a variety of habitats, near extensive, shallow, open-water feeding areas.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, mostly diurnal activity, except often feeds nocturnally in hunting season (Palmer 1976). Sometimes migrates nocturnally, but principally diurnal

migrant (Palmer 1976).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Most of the population wintering in California migrates to breeding grounds in the northern continental U.S., Canada, and Alaska, thus, mostly absent May to August. Those breeding in northeastern California usually migrate, except during mild winters. Those few breeding in the Central Valley may be nonmigratory.

Home Range: Marked broods in South Dakota were less mobile than most other puddle ducks studied, and ventured less than 0.32 km (0.2 mi) from their home water areas (Evans et al. 1952). No other data on home range.

Territory: Defense of breeding territory has been observed in some studies, but not in others (Palmer 1976). Territories have not been measured.

Reproduction: Only a very minor portion of the wintering population breeds in California, mainly on the northeastern plateau, where nesting occurs May to July (Cogswell 1977). Pair formation commonly takes place in winter. Monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch size usually 9-11, range 3-12. Single-brooded. Incubation 24-25 days (Bellrose 1976). Precocial young usually tended by the female only, but sometimes accompanied by a drake as well. Captive young first flew at 45-63 days; wild young often become independent before capable of flight. First breeds at 1 yr (Palmer 1976).

Niche: Nests have been parasitized by white-winged scoters, lesser scaups, and shovelers (Palmer 1976), but the rate of parasitism is very low (Johnsgard 1975b). In studies reviewed by Bellrose (1976), the most common nest predators were crows, skunks, and ground squirrels. Commonly associates with American coots, tundra swans, brants, canvasbacks, redheads, and other waterfowl, feeding on plant materials these others dislodge, or actually stealing food that they bring to the surface (Bellrose 1976, Palmer 1976).

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