

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

CANVASBACK

Aythya valisineria

Family: ANATIDAE
B089

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The canvasback is found in estuarine and lacustrine habitats throughout much of California. Abundant November to March, and less common September to October and April to May on bays along northern and central California coast, especially San Francisco Bay. In these seasons, common on Salton Sea and in the Central Valley, less common elsewhere in lowlands and southern California, and rare on northern mountain lakes. In northeastern California, abundant October to November and March to April (and through mild winters), and rare, or local, through summer. Breeds in fresh, emergent wetlands bordering open water. Elsewhere in California, irregular in summer, mainly along coast and on Salton Sea (Cogswell 1977, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1978, 1979, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats seeds, tubers, leaves, and stems of aquatic plants (mainly submergents), aquatic mollusks, crustaceans, worms, insects, and fish. Invertebrates are the principal foods in winter (Grinnell et al. 1918, Cogswell 1977), and of adult females and young in summer (Bartonek and Hickey 1969a, 1969b). Most studies of wintering elsewhere, both in fresh and saline water, found that plant foods predominated in the diet (Palmer 1976). Dives for food, usually in water 0.9-3.6 m (3-12 ft) deep (Palmer 1976), and grubs in bottom sediments, or pursues fish. Also tips up, in shallower water, and takes food from surface. Prefers extensive areas of shallow water for foraging.

Cover: Usually rests on water far from shore, but stays near protected shorelines during high winds.

Reproduction: Nests in California only in small numbers. The nest is a mound of aquatic vegetation amidst emergent plants, over shallow water, and near open water. The body of water may be a small pond, slough, or large emergent wetland or lake. Sometimes nests are stranded on dry land when water recedes.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: For nesting, requires emergent vegetation near suitable shallow-water foraging areas.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity. Typically feeds early and late in day, and rests during midday and at night. In tidal areas, feeds most actively in shallow water just after tideflats flood (Cogswell 1977).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Except for a small breeding population in northeastern California, the wintering population migrates to breeding grounds in the northern continental U.S., Canada, and Alaska, and mostly is absent June to August.

Home Range: Breeding home ranges of 2 drakes in Manitoba were 525 ha (1300 ac) and 1035 ha (2560 ac) (Dzubin 1955).

Territory: Apparently no territory is defended. At times, the drake defends an area of about 5 m (16 ft) around his mate, but at other times he ignores other males (Hochbaum 1944, Dzubin 1955).

Reproduction: Some pairing takes place in winter. In California, young reported June to August (Cogswell 1977). Monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch size usually 7-9 (Harrison 1978). Single-brooded. Incubation 23-29 days. Precocial young tended by female only, and probably first fly at 60-70 days, but become independent several wks earlier. Female breeds first as yearling. Male may go unmated because of skewed sex ratio.

Niche: Nest parasitism by redhead is one of the main causes of nest desertion, and also reduces hatching success (Bellrose 1976). Other common causes of desertion are parasitism by other canvasbacks, and flooding (Bellrose 1976). Important nest predators include raccoons, skunks, ravens, crows and magpies. Numbers have declined from drainage of breeding wetlands, and perhaps from overshooting of females and young (Palmer 1976).

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