

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

LESSER SCAUP

Aythya affinis

Family: ANATIDAE
B094

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The lesser scaup inhabits estuarine and lacustrine habitats throughout much of California. Very common to abundant October to April, and fairly common September and May, along entire coast and on Salton Sea. At same seasons, common on lakes throughout lowlands and foothills, and in southern mountains, but especially near the coast. In northeastern California, common November to December, March, and through mild winters, and fairly common through summer as a breeder, nesting in fresh emergent wetland near open water. Stragglers remain through summer elsewhere in California, but do not breed. Occurs on northern California mountain lakes as a rare migrant (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats primarily aquatic invertebrates, mainly mollusks, insects, crustaceans, and probably worms. Also eats leaves, stems, seeds, and tubers of aquatic plants, which predominate in the diet of nonbreeders in some areas (Bellrose 1976). On breeding grounds in Canada, adults and juveniles fed almost entirely on aquatic invertebrates (Bartonek and Hickey 1969a, 1969b, Sugden 1973). Usually dives for food, in water up to 12 m (40 ft) deep (Bellrose 1976), but preferably 1-3 m (3-10 ft) deep. Also tips up, and takes food from the surface. Most often, food is gleaned or grubbed from bottom sediments.

Cover: Usually rests on open water far from shore, but occasionally rests on shores or mudflats.

Reproduction: Nest is built near a pond or lake, usually on dry land in the shelter of dense herbaceous vegetation, often on an island. Occasionally it is built on a tussock or muskrat house in emergent wetlands, or on a floating mat of vegetation. In Alberta, many pairs nested on artificial islands (Giroux 1981). In northeastern California, most nests were in nettles or grasses over 0.3 m (1 ft) high, and all were within 45 m (50 yds) of water (Miller and Collins 1954). Usually nests are near water, but they may be as far as 539 m (590 yd) away (Bellrose 1976).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Prefers to nest in dense herbaceous vegetation near a lake or pond.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, circadian activity. Feeds most actively in early morning, except in tidal areas where schedule related to the tides.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Except for a small breeding population in northeastern

California, the wintering population migrates to breeding grounds in Oregon, Washington, Canada, and Alaska, and mostly is absent June to August.

Home Range: Has a large home range, but no specific information found (Bellrose 1976). Densities on islands have been as high as 58.5 per ha (23.7 per ac) (Vermeer 1970).

Territory: No evidence of territoriality. Nests tend to be concentrated in small areas, rather than dispersed throughout suitable habitat (Palmer 1976).

Reproduction: Pair bond most often formed in March. In northeastern California, laying begins as early as the first wk in May. Monogamous breeder, frequently nesting near other pairs, especially on islands. Nests tend to be concentrated in small areas rather than dispersed throughout suitable habitat. Clutch size usually 9-11. Single-brooded. Incubation 21-22 days, occasionally as long as 27 days. The precocial young are tended by the female only, but families often merge to form larger groups. Young first fly at 47-54 days, but probably are independent before that. Some females first breed as yearlings, but others may not breed until older.

Niche: Occasionally parasitizes nests of its own and other species of ducks, and ruddy ducks have laid in lesser scaup nests. Nests preyed upon by skunks, as well as ground squirrels, weasels, crows, and magpies (Bellrose 1976). Gulls may prey heavily on ducklings.

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