

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

BLACK SCOTER

Melanitta americana

Family: ANATIDAE

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B098

Written by: S. Granholm

Reviewed by: D. Raveling

Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The black scoter is an uncommon winter resident October to April on estuarine and marine waters near shore, along entire California coast, but most commonly north of Point Reyes, Marin Co. More numerous some years. Rare south of Los Angeles Co. (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1979, Garret and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats mostly marine invertebrates, especially bivalve mollusks, but also including gastropods, barnacles, and shrimp. Herring roe, and small amounts of aquatic plant materials also are consumed. Often feeds in groups, diving for food on bottom, preferably in water 3.6 to 9 m (12-30 ft) deep (Palmer 1976). Feeds in smooth or rough water, often just beyond the surf.

Cover: Rests on open water near shore, but beyond the surf, usually along exposed coast. Sometimes moves to sheltered waters during storms.

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Nest is concealed in low vegetation, often on a hummock, usually near a pond or lake, in tundra or the northern forest zone.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Found on bays, estuaries, and ocean near shore. For nesting, requires ground cover for nest concealment, near a lake or pond.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, mostly diurnal activity. Migration is nocturnal.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: The California wintering population migrates to breeding grounds in Alaska, and is absent from May to September.

Home Range: In 13 study areas in Iceland, Bengtson (1970) found an average density of 1 nest per 2 ha (5 ac). No additional information found.

Territory: No evidence of territoriality. Nests usually dispersed widely.

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Pairs apparently form in winter, and nesting begins in late May or June. Monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch size 6-10, usually 7-8. Single-brooded. Incubation about 28 days. The precocial young are tended by the female only. Female leaves young before they attain flight, at 6-7 wk, or older. Breeds first at 3 or 2 yr.

Niche: Broods may merge to form creches (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Comments: This species is poorly studied, and little literature is available.

REFERENCES

- Bellrose, F. C. 1976. Ducks, geese, and swans of North America. 2nd ed. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA. 544pp.
- Bengtson, S. A. 1970. Location of nest-sites of ducks in Lake Myvatn area, northeast Iceland. *Oikos* 21:218-229.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1975b. Waterfowl of North America. Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington. 575pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Palmer, R. S., ed. 1976. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 2. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. 521pp.
- Palmer, R. S., ed. 1976. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 3. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. 560pp.
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1979. Concept plan for waterfowl wintering habitat preservation: California coast. U.S. Dep. Inter., Fish and Wildl. Serv., Portland, OR. 234pp.

B098

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.