

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

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER

Melanitta fusca

Family: ANATIDAE
B100

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to fairly common winter resident along the entire coast in ocean waters and bays. Occurs in estuarine (large bays and river mouths) and marine waters near shore along California coast, south regularly to Point Conception, Santa Barbara Co., and the northern Channel Islands, and irregularly farther south. Common October to April, fairly common September and May. Uncommon (locally common) through summer, mainly at the mouths of rivers or tidal sloughs. Does not breed in California. Occurs locally on lacustrine waters throughout California as a very rare and irregular spring and fall migrant, especially on the Salton Sea (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats almost entirely animal foods, mostly bivalve and gastropod mollusks, with some crustaceans, and lesser quantities of other invertebrates and fishes. Also consumes small amounts of aquatic plant materials and, on the breeding grounds, aquatic insects. Dives and takes food from bottom, preferring shallow water, sometimes less than 1.8 m (6 ft) deep, but also foraging in water as deep as 12 m (40 ft) (Palmer 1976). On coastal wintering grounds, prefers to feed in sheltered waters of bays and on the leeward side of islands, especially on shellfish beds on sandy and gravelly bottoms (Palmer 1976). On breeding lakes, typically feeds in open water 1-4 m (3.3 to 13 ft) deep, with dense submergent vegetation (Brown and Brown 1981).

Cover: Prefers to rest on sheltered waters of bays, and on the leeward side of islands (Palmer 1976). Rarely, if ever, comes ashore, except when the female nests.

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Nests in Canada and Alaska usually well hidden in dense low herbs or brush, in habitats with few, if any, trees, usually near ponds, lakes or sluggish streams, but up to 0.8 km (0.5 mi) distant (Palmer 1976). Prefers permanent lakes larger than 45 ha (112 ac); broods are reared in open, shallow water areas with submergent vegetation and some protection from wave action (Brown and Brown 1981).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: For nesting, requires low, dense brush or herbaceous growth within about 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of suitable freshwater feeding area, but preferably much closer.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, circadian activity. Reliable observations have been made of crepuscular and nocturnal, as well as diurnal, feeding (Palmer 1976). Migrates both night and day.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Except for a small nonbreeding summer contingent, the California wintering population migrates to breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska, and is absent from June to August.

Home Range: On favored nesting islands, densities as high as 20 nests on less than 0.2 ha (0.5 ac) have been recorded (Palmer 1976).

Territory: The drake defends an area of water near the nest, driving away other males, and waiting for his mate to join him periodically (Palmer 1976). According to Johnsgard (1975b), however, it is doubtful whether territories are defended; rather, the female is defended.

Reproduction: Does not breed in California. Most pairs are formed before spring migration, and nesting begins in June. Monogamous, usually solitary nester, but sometimes nests in high densities, especially on islands. Clutch size 6-16, and single-brooded. Incubation 25-30 days (Brown and Brown 1981). The precocial young are tended by the female only, but sometimes several families merge into larger groups. The young first fly at 63-77 days, but usually deserted by the hen before that. Breeds first at 2 yr (Palmer 1976).

Niche: In central Canada, 12 of 101 nests were parasitized by other ducks, greatly increasing the desertion rate (Brown and Brown 1981). Many young ducklings were killed by gulls. Adults frequently killed by oil pollution and sometimes by fowl cholera. Few are taken by hunters.

REFERENCES

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