

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

COMMON GOLDENEYE

Bucephala clangula

Family: ANATIDAE

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B101

Written by: S. Granholm

Reviewed by: D. Raveling

Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The common goldeneye is a regular winter resident in coastal northern California, but also occurs in the Central Valley, northeastern California and elsewhere in the coastal region. Preferred habitats are estuarine (bays, lagoons, and salt ponds) and lacustrine waters (usually the deeper lakes and ponds). On riverine waters it is rare and irregular, except on the Colorado River. Also rare and local on marine waters near shore. Common November to March, and uncommon October and April, along the coast from Mendocino to Monterey cos.; rare on extreme north coast, and rare to locally fairly common on south coast. Also in winter, fairly common on Salton Sea and Colorado River, and on lakes elsewhere throughout lowlands and foothills; and fairly common to rare in northeastern California, and on large east-slope Sierra Nevada lakes. Scarce transient on lakes of southern mountains and deserts, mainly November to December (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds mainly on crustaceans, mollusks, small fish, and insects (on fresh water). About ¼ of diet is seeds, tubers, leaves and stems of aquatic plants (Bellrose 1976). Juveniles eat an even higher proportion of animal foods, mainly insects. Dives and takes food from bottom by gleaning, grubbing in mud, or turning over stones; pursues prey underwater; gleans prey from subsurface vegetation. Prefers to feed in water 0.9 to 3.6 m (3-12 ft) deep, but will use water as deep as 6 m (20 ft), or more (Palmer 1976).

Cover: At night, usually rests in large flocks on open water well offshore. Seldom comes ashore, except when female visits nest.

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Typically nests in an open-top cavity in a tree, often a pileated woodpecker nest hole. Tree usually near, or in, water of a lake, pond, or quiet, shallow river or stream, preferably bordered by herbaceous vegetation. Also uses nest boxes, and where tree cavities are unavailable, may nest in abandoned buildings or in cavities on slopes or among rocks (Palmer 1976). See Lumsden et al. (1980) for a review of natural cavities used, and experiments on nestbox preferences.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Frequents estuarine and lacustrine waters. Requires a suitable nest hole relatively near a lake, pond, or river.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

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

Home Range: In Minnesota, wintering individuals moved as far as 43 km (27 mi) between a foraging area and a nightly roosting area (Breckenridge 1953).

Territory: Not territorial but the drake defends a small area around his mate (Bellrose 1976).

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Nesting begins in May or June. Monogamous, solitary nester; clutch size 6-11, and single-brooded. Incubation 27-32 days. Precocial young tended by female only; attain flight at 51-60 days, but usually deserted by female long before that. Breeds first at 2 yr (Palmer 1976, Harrison 1978).

Niche: Nest predators include raccoons, tree squirrels, and starlings. Nest often deserted after nest parasitism by other female common goldeneyes. Adults killed by oil spills and golden eagles. Loss to hunters apparently low.

REFERENCES

- Bellrose, F. C. 1976. Ducks, geese, and swans of North America. 2nd ed. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA. 544pp.
- Breckenridge, W. J. 1953. Night rafting o American goldeneyes on the Mississippi River. *Auk* 70:201-204.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland, OH. 416pp.
- Harrison, C. J. O., ed. 1978. Bird families of the world. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. 264pp.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1975b. Waterfowl of North America. Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington. 575pp.
- Lumsden, H. G., R. E. Page, and M. Gauthier. 1980. Choice of nest boxes by common goldeneyes in Ontario. *Wilson Bull.* 92:497-505.
- 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.