

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

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER

Mergus serrator

Family: ANATIDAE

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B106

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Common resident October through April on coastal bays, estuaries, and along rocky inshore coastal areas. Occurs in smaller numbers near offshore islands and, primarily in April, on large inland lakes and rivers below 1200 m (3900 ft). Rare to uncommon in California May to September. Common along Colorado River April and October (Cogswell 1977). Occurs erratically on Salton Sea at any season.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Dives to pursue fish, crustaceans, and amphibians in open waters, and near underwater stumps, rocks, and logs. Sometimes swims in shallow water with only head submerged. Also probes underwater crevices to flush out fish or other prey. May feed cooperatively, driving fish into shallow water. Also takes insects and worms (Palmer 1976).

Cover: Dives for cover.

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Nests in southern tundra, and lakes of boreal forests. Uses marshes, rocky inlets, vegetated islands in large lakes, bank recesses, and driftwood piles, usually associated with bodies of water.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Requires lakes and rivers with clear water and abundant fish. In winter, uses coasts and bays.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong diurnal activity. Some nocturnal activity during migration.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: In North America, migrates in flocks of 5-15 by coastal and inland routes between breeding grounds in tundra and boreal forests and Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts. Along coasts, migration appears to be diurnal, but inland apparently occurs at night (Bellrose 1976).

Home Range: No data found, but extensive movements with the tide in estuarine systems.

Territory: Not territorial in nonbreeding season.

Reproduction: In Canada and Alaska, female lays 5-11 eggs from late May to early July (Bellrose 1976). Probably does not reneest. Broods often combine to form large groups.

Niche: Occasionally robbed of prey by gulls or each other. May attract herons while

feeding (Emlen and Ambrose 1970). Predation on eggs by ravens has been reported. Eggs and nestlings taken by weasels, skunks, foxes, and snakes. Adults may be preyed upon by a variety of raptors.

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