

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

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RUDDY DUCK

*Oxyura jamaicensis*

Family: ANATIDAE  
B107

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant yearlong resident throughout much of California, excluding the southern deserts and the Sierra Nevada. Prefers estuarine (bays, salt ponds) and lacustrine habitats, and occasionally found on marine waters near shore. Nests in fresh emergent wetland bordering lacustrine habitats. From late September to April, common to abundant along coast, on Salton Sea, and in northeastern California, and common elsewhere in California, except in the high Sierra Nevada. Numbers decline markedly in northeastern California in some winters. Fairly uncommon through summer, except locally common, especially in northeastern California, and rare along coast and in northern mountains. 75% of breeding population in California is in the Klamath Basin. Breeds only in freshwater habitats, even at the Salton Sea, where it nests in fresh emergent wetland at river mouths (Cogswell 1977, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1978, 1979, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Major plant foods are seeds, tubers, foliage and stems of submerged aquatic plants; also algae and seeds of bulrush. Animal foods include aquatic insects in freshwater, and mollusks, crustaceans, and worms in saltwater. Eats mostly plant materials in winter (Palmer 1976), but mostly animal foods in some coastal areas, and in summer (Siegfried 1973, Barcelona 1976). Usually dives to bottom and gleans food, or filters bottom sediments; but also filters invertebrates from surface and subsurface water, or dips head in water to eat submerged plants. Usually feeds in water 0.6-3 m (2-10 ft) deep (Bellrose 1976), typically on large waters.

**Cover:** Rests on water, typically on large, open expanses. Seldom comes ashore, except a female leading a brood overland from one water area to another.

**Reproduction:** Nest built above shallow water amidst dense, tall fresh-emergent vegetation, near open water of lake, pond, or marsh. In western U.S., prefers hardstem bulrush, but also uses sedges and cattails (Bellrose 1976). Nests found as far as 121 m (400 ft) from open water, but usually are much closer (Bellrose 1976).

**Water:** No additional data found.

**Pattern:** Uses estuarine and lacustrine habitats. For nesting, requires dense, tall, emergent vegetation bordering open water of a lake, pond, or marsh.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity, except migrates nocturnally.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Present yearlong in much of California range, but wintering population mostly migrates north and east to breeding grounds in other western states and in Canada; departing April or May and returning late August or September.

**Home Range:** In Utah, a hen with a brood usually remained within a 50-75 m (164-246 ft) length of ditch or canal during a 3-5 wk period, but when disturbed some moved the brood up to 500 m (1640 ft) (Joyner 1977). In Manitoba, broods were more sedentary than those of other ducks, but some moved 205 m (674 ft) (Bellrose 1976).

**Territory:** In Utah, pairs apparently defended territories approximately 3 m (10 ft) in radius around nests (Joyner 1969), and nests were located as little as 6 m (20 ft) apart. According to Siegfried (1976), males in Manitoba defended 3 m (10 ft) radius round mates, on or off the nest, but did not defend a territory.

**Reproduction:** Pair formation occurs after arrival at breeding grounds. In California, breeds April to October, mostly May to August (Cogswell 1977). Monogamous, solitary nester, but nests may be as little as 6 m (20 ft) apart. Clutch size 5-15, averaging 8-10. Usually single-brooded, but can be double-brooded in southwestern U.S. Incubation about 23 days. Precocial young tended by the female, and occasionally accompanied by the male. It is doubtful whether the young benefit from the male's presence (Joyner 1977). Brood deserted by parents at 3-4 wk, and first fly at 6 wk. Age at first breeding is unknown in wild (Palmer 1976).

**Niche:** Often parasitizes nests of other ducks, and frequently parasitized by redhead (Johnsgard 1975b). High rate of nest desertion may be caused by nest parasitism (Johnsgard 1975b) and by receding water levels (Bellrose 1976). Other causes of nest failure are flooding and, to a lesser extent, predation by crows and magpies. Mortality from hunting is relatively low. Marsh drainage, drought, and overshooting in the past have reduced numbers to a fraction of former level (Palmer 1976).

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