

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

CHUKAR

Alectoris chukar

Family: PHASIANIDAE
B132

Order: GALLIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Uncommon to common permanent resident of arid, rocky annual grassland and brush and scrub habitats with available water. First introduced into California in 1932. Established predominantly east of the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range, and along inner Coast Ranges from Pacheco Pass to the Tehachapi Mts. Occurs in Great Basin and Mojave Desert vegetation associations. Found below sea level in Death Valley, and up to 3659 m (12,000 ft) in the White Mts. (Harper et al. 1958).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages on the ground; gleans, grazes, and scratches. Primarily eats seeds of cheatgrass, other grasses, and exotic annual forbs. Also eats fruits and leaves of a variety of other plants. Adults consume less than 5% insects by volume; young eat more (Johnsgard 1973). Will dig through up to 20 cm (8 in) of snow for food.

Cover: Provided by rock outcrops, talus slopes, and vegetation. Roosts on slopes with at least 7% grade. Rocks and cliffs provide cover from inclement weather. Will fly or run, often upslope, to escape predators.

Reproduction: Nests often placed on steep talus slopes or slopes with rocky outcrops, above streams. Nest commonly placed under sagebrush, or in sagebrush-grassland, within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of water.

Water: Congregates at water in summer. Drinks daily in hot, dry weather. Water is a major habitat component affecting distribution, especially in summer. In California, distribution generally limited to habitats that receive 12-50 cm (5-20 in) annual rainfall (Johnsgard 1973).

Pattern: Optimum habitat includes 25-50% steep, rocky or talus slopes, rock outcrops, cliffs and bluffs, and 50% sagebrush and cheatgrass, near brushy stream drainages with grasses and water (Galbreath and Moreland 1953, Christensen 1970).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Seasonal movements may include altitudinal migration of 8-16 km (5-10 mi) from lower elevations in winter to higher areas for summer.

Home Range: In Utah, coveys moved daily over 2.6 km² (1 mi²) (Phelps 1955). In dry periods, may travel 3.2 to 4.8 km (2-3 mi) to water (Johnsgard 1973).

Territory: Probably not territorial (Johnsgard 1973). In Washington, male defended only

area immediately around female during mating season (Mackie and Buechner 1963).

Reproduction: Breeds late March to early September; peak from mid-May to early July. Clutch size 10-20, average 15. Incubates about 24 days; hatching peaks in May. Male apparently assists with incubation and brooding; female may begin second clutch. Coveys of 5-40 form in late summer. Productivity varies greatly from year to year, affected mostly by weather.

Niche: Impact of chukar on native fauna and flora is unknown, although Harper et al. (1958) suggested that there was little competition for food with native species. Has been able to survive in habitats degraded by land use practices where native species have been extirpated locally. Cooper's hawks, coyotes, and ravens are among the numerous reported predators.

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