

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

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RUFFED GROUSE

*Bonasa umbellus*

Family: PHASIANIDAE  
B136

Order: GALLIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Uncommon local resident of valley foothill riparian and surrounding conifer forests at low to middle elevations in northwestern California. Yocom (1978) reported distribution in recent decades from extreme northern Del Norte Co. south to extreme southern Humboldt Co., and westward to northern Trinity Co. and southwestern Siskiyou Co.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Favors aspen, alder, and willow buds and catkins; also eats leaves, twigs, buds, flowers, and fruits of other forest plants. Arthropods are important in early summer, especially to chicks. Browses, grazes, and gleans food from ground and vegetation. Searches and pounces on arthropods.

**Cover:** Uses thickets of alder, maple, hawthorn, birch, and other deciduous trees for summer and fall cover, and adjacent conifer stands, which are used for winter shelter and escape cover.

**Reproduction:** Male uses medium to large rotting logs as drumming platforms. Usually nests near base of tree, stump, log, or brush, near stream (Talmadge 1957).

**Water:** Water needs mostly met by succulent leaves, berries, and arthropods; but known to drink.

**Pattern:** Requires a mosaic of habitats; riparian stands with young and old deciduous trees, brushy areas interspersed with herbaceous inclusions, and conifer stands for cover.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Not migratory. Male generally more sedentary than female. Young may disperse several miles in autumn (Chambers and Sharp 1958. Godfrey and Marshall 1969).

**Home Range:** In Minnesota, winter home ranges of 2 females were 2.8 and 11 ha (7 and 26 ac). Average home range of 9 prenesting females was 12 ha (30 ac), varying from 5.8 to 23 ha (14.3 to 56.6 ac). During laying, these home ranges averaged 8.4 ha (20.8 ac), and varied from 4.1 to 14 ha (10.1 to 34.6 ac). During incubation, these home ranges averaged 0.9 ha (2.2 ac), and varied from 0.4 to 1.5 ha (1.0 to 3.7 ac) (Maxson 1978).

**Territory:** In Minnesota, territory varied from 4.1 to 12 ha (10-30 ac). Adult male remains close to drumming logs all year, defending about 4 ha (10 ac). The display platform is about

230 cm<sup>2</sup> (36 in<sup>2</sup>) on a rotting log. Territory defended before onset of drumming (Gullion 1967).

Reproduction: Breeds late February to late August. Peak activity March to May for drumming, and May to July for nesting and brooding. Clutch of average 9-12 eggs (range 6-15) hatches in June or July after incubation of 24 days. Female cares for brood; brood remains together until late autumn.

Niche: Throughout the northern U.S., associated with deciduous forests, especially mesic stands with large amounts of aspen, birch, alder, and willow. Little information available for California population. Predators include goshawks, Cooper's hawks, raccoons, bobcats, Iynx, and various canids, mustelids, and snakes.

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