

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

AMERICAN AVOCET

Recurvirostra americana

Family: RECURVIROSTRIDAE
B164

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant winter visitor to salt ponds, fresh and saline emergent wetlands, and mudflat habitats throughout the Central Valley and the central and southern coastal areas. Breeds from March to mid-July, and is relatively common during this period in northeast California, the Central Valley, and coastal estuaries (Cogswell 1977). Common most of the year at the Salton Sea, but only a few pairs have been known to nest (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages on mudflats, salt or alkali flats, in shallow ponded areas with silt bottoms, and in salt ponds (Hamilton 1975, Cogswell 1977). Feeds by probing in mud, sweeping bill through water or soupy mud, or by swimming and tipping-up like ducks. Preferred foods include aquatic insects, crustaceans, snails, worms, and occasionally seeds of aquatic plants (Cogswell 1977).

Cover: May flock together during storms on the leeward side of levees and dikes for cover (Rigney and Rigney 1981).

Reproduction: Primary nesting habitats are relatively barren islands in salt ponds or alkali lakes, levees, dikes, or untravelled road beds, near feeding areas. Also may nest on salt flats or in wet meadows (Bent 1927, Gibson 1971, Cogswell 1977). Nest is a simple scrape 0.5 to 3 cm (0.2 to 1.2 in) deep on the top of a levee, or on an island or salt flat. Nest usually lined with vegetation or small pebbles.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: For breeding, depends upon relatively undisturbed levees and islands within or near feeding areas, on estuarine salt ponds, or other estuarine or inland shallow-water impoundments or lakes.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity, except migration apparently is nocturnal (Gibson 1971).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: A portion of the central coast wintering population is migratory, moving inland to the Central Valley, northeastern California, and eastern Sierra Nevada in mid-March to breed. A somewhat smaller population (600-800 pairs) is resident in the San Francisco Bay area (Gill 1973, Rigney and Rigney 1981).

Home Range: No additional data found.

Territory: Gibson (1971) identified 3 types of territories during different periods in the nesting cycle. Prior to egg laying, territory was centered around feeding area. During incubation, both the nest and a secondary feeding area 50-130 m (162-422 ft) in diameter were defended. Once the eggs hatched, adults defended an area 20-100 m (65-325 ft) in diameter centered around chicks.

Reproduction: Peak egg-laying is April, and hatching occurs from early to mid-June. Three or 4 eggs laid; average 3.7 per nest (Gibson 1971). Single-brooded; both parents incubate the eggs for 22-24 days (Harrison 1978). Precocial young are mobile within 3-4 hr after hatching. Defended by both adults, and family remains intact for about 25 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Nests are subject to flooding if water levels in salt ponds are raised.

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