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

GREATER YELLOWLEGS *Tringa melanoleuca*
Family: SCOLOPACIDAE Order: CHARADRIIFORMES Class: AVES
B165

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common to abundant spring and fall migrant, and uncommon to fairly common winter visitant, along coastal California, in the Central Valley, and at the Salton Sea (McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Uncommon to fairly common as a migrant in northern California mountains and Great Basin regions, but casual or absent there in winter (McCaskie et al. 1979). Occurs rarely throughout coastal and inland California in the summer. Occupies a variety of shallow lacustrine and estuarine habitats. Typical foraging habitats include shallow emergent wetlands, wet meadows, borders of small pools, flooded fields, stream channels, drainage ditches, and intertidal mudflats (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Often forages in shallow water and takes prey by snatching at, or just below, the surface. At times, wades in water up to the belly, and may capture prey by skimming the surface. Probing into the substrate is a less common feeding method. Quick and graceful in all feeding activities. Typical prey include various aquatic insects (dytiscid and hydrophilid beetles and water boatmen), small fish, crustaceans, worms and a variety of terrestrial insects (Bent 1927, Johnsgard 1981). Gobies may be important fish prey in some areas of coastal California (Reeder 1951).

Cover: In estaurine habitats, needs undisturbed areas above high tide waters for roosting during the high tide period.

Reproduction: Breeds in Alaska and Canada, primarily in muskeg forest, but also in subalpine scrub and subarctic tundra. Typical nesting habitat is in burned-over or grass-covered clearings that are close to ponds or wetlands, and that are surrounded by stands of low poplar, birch, or spruce trees. The nest is a shallow, sparsely-lined depression in moss or dry peat. Nest often placed on a low hummock or ridge beside a branch, or under a dwarf birch (Harrison 1978, Johnsgard 1981).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Muskeg forests and subarctic tundra in northern Canada and southern Alaska are used during the breeding season, and several freshwater and estuarine wetland habitats are used during the nonbreeding season.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Most numerous in California as a spring and fall migrant, but also occurs as a winter visitant and a rare summer nonbreeder. Fall migrants arrive in

early July and the major fall passage occurs from late July to early October. As with many shorebirds, adults arrive well before the first juveniles (about 1 mo) (Bent 1927, Page et al. 1979). The main spring passage through California is from mid-March to mid-May (McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Home Range: No more than a dozen pairs nested in one area covering several square miles (Bannerman 1961).

Territory: Little is known of the territorial behavior on breeding grounds. Defends feeding territory on wintering grounds in coastal Argentina (Myers and Myers 1979).

Reproduction: Breeding season begins in May; nests with full clutches are found starting in late May and early June. Little information is available on the reproductive biology of this species. Average clutch size is 4 eggs. Incubation apparently by the female alone, but incubation period not known. Only 1 brood is produced in a season (Palmer 1967, Harrison 1978). Precocial young leave the nest within hours of hatching and are attended by both parents.

Niche: May form small, vocal flocks in winter.

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