

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

LESSER YELLOWLEGS

Tringa flavipes

Family: SCOLOPACIDAE

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

B166

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Occurs in California primarily as an uncommon to fairly common fall migrant, and a very uncommon spring migrant. From October to March it is rare to very uncommon; most winter occurrences are from coastal central and southern California. Mostly has departed from California by mid-May, and casual in the summer (McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Often local in distribution, and not seen in flocks of more than 10-20. On occasion, concentrations of spring or fall migrants numbering 75-100 have been noted, most typically on southern California estuaries or at the Salton Sea (Garrett and Dunn 1981). During migration, occurs along the outer coast and adjacent coastal lowlands, the Central Valley, Great Basin, and Salton Sea. Stragglers occasionally reach the mountains in the fall (McCaskie et al. 1979). Forages along shallow lacustrine, wet meadow, and estuarine mudflat habitats. It especially prefers flooded fields, drainage ditches, shallow wetlands, and other calm, freshwater habitats. In general, far less numerous than the greater yellowlegs, which it closely resembles in appearance and habits.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds in an energetic manner; often forages in shallow water by pecking at the water surface or mud. Normally does not probe. Prey taken in nonbreeding season includes a variety of adult and larval aquatic insects (water boatmen and dytiscid beetles), grasshoppers, small fish, crustaceans, and worms (Bent 1927).

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

Reproduction: Breeds in Alaska and northern Canada in open woodland clearings or burned-over areas, usually close to grassy wetlands. The nest is a depression made in the underlying soil or matted vegetation and, although usually in the open, it occasionally is placed beside a branch or under a dwarf birch. The nest may be lined with dry leaves and grasses (Harrison 1978, Johnsgard 1981).

Water: No additional information found.

Pattern: Areas of muskeg and low-growing subarctic forest are used for breeding, and shallow, freshwater wetlands and estuarine mudflats are used in the nonbreeding season.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: As with many arctic and subarctic shorebirds, adults precede young on the southward migration (Palmer 1967). In California, the fall passage is

from late July to mid-October, and the spring passage is in March and April (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Small numbers winter in California. Breeding grounds are reached in late April in the southern part of the range, and by late May in the north (Johnsgard 1981).

Home Range: Nest density in western Canada reached 3-4 pairs/40 ha (100 ac), but usually it is much lower (Bannerman 1961). In coastal Argentina in nonbreeding season, small flocks fly from foraging areas to night-time roosts (Myers and Myers 1979).

Territory: Both sexes perform a song flight on the breeding grounds (Johnsgard 1981). Defends feeding territory in coastal Argentina 0.1 to 0.5 ha (0.2 to 1.2 ac) in size, or that extends up to 100 m (330 ft) along sloughs (Myers and Myers 1979).

Reproduction: Breeding season usually begins in mid-May. Clutch size of this loosely colonial species usually is 4 eggs, and the incubation period is 22-23 days. Both sexes incubate, and the precocial young leave the nest within hours of hatching. Young tended by both parents. Age of first flight not known, but probably 22-23 days (Palmer 1967, Harrison 1978, Johnsgard 1981).

Niche: Wades to breast level. Young hatch synchronously.

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