

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

---

WHIMBREL

*Numenius phaeopus*

Family: SCOLOPACIDAE  
B172

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: C. Swarth

Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt

Edited by: S. Granholm, R. Duke

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Fairly common to abundant as a spring migrant from mid-March to late May. Less common, but still numerous, in fall migration from early August to mid-October. In winter, rare to very uncommon in coastal central California, but fairly common along the southern California coast. Absent, or very rare, in winter on the northern California coast and in the interior part of the state. Small numbers of nonbreeders occur regularly through the summer (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). It is very rare during all seasons in mountainous regions and in the Great Basin (McCaskie et al. 1979). On the coast, forages on rocky intertidal and sandy beach marine habitats, on the intertidal mudflats of estuarine habitats, and on wet meadow and pasture habitats adjacent to the immediate coast. Occasionally forages on lawns or golf courses. Inland, prefers flooded fields, wet meadows, croplands and the margins of riverine and lacustrine habitats (Cogswell 1977, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds by probing into the substrate or by picking prey from the surface. Berries and various insects are taken on the breeding grounds (Bent 1929). In estuarine habitats during the nonbreeding season, feeds on crabs, crayfish, marine worms, grasshoppers, beetles, spiders, and berries (Bent 1929, Palmer 1967). Inland during this same season, feeds on grasshoppers, spiders, and beetles (Bent 1929).

**Cover:** Needs undisturbed areas above high tide for roosting during the high tide period.

**Reproduction:** Nests in arctic regions in open areas on moist hummocky tundra amid grasses, cotton-grass, and low heath. Less often nests in drier sites, or even in areas with scattered trees. The nest is a sparsely lined shallow depression, often located on a ridge or in a tussock (Palmer 1967).

**Water:** No additional data found.

**Pattern:** Inhabits moist, hummocky tundra during the nesting season; intertidal habitats, flooded fields, pastures, croplands, and lakeshores in the nonbreeding season.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** In spring and fall migration, travels along the coast and adjacent coastal lowlands, and through the central part of the state. In spring, large numbers stop in the Central Valley, Imperial Valley, and Salton Sea area. Spring flocks at the south end of the Salton Sea may contain thousands (Garrett and Dunn 1981). The main fall

passage is along the coast (Cogswell 1977). Winters in California, mainly along the southern coast, and small numbers of nonbreeders remain through the summer.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Defends a feeding territory in rocky intertidal and sandy beach habitats along the central California coast (Myers et al. 1979).

Reproduction: Nesting season begins in early June. Average clutch size is 4 eggs, and both sexes incubate. Incubation period is about 23 days, and the precocial young leave the nest within hours of hatching. Only one brood is raised in a season. Both parents tend the brood, and the young are able to fly at about 30 days (Palmer 1967).

Niche: Winters south to Chile and Brazil. Increasing nest density related to increasing success (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

## REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1929. Life histories of North American shorebirds. Part 2. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 146. 412pp.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Myers, J. P., P. G. Connors, and F. A. Pitelka. 1979. Territory size in wintering sanderlings: the effects of prey abundance and intruder density. *Auk* 96:551-561.
- Page, G. W., L. E. Stenzel, and C. M. Wolfe. 1979. Aspects of the occurrence of shorebirds on a central California estuary. Pages 15-32 in F. A. Pitelka, ed. Shorebirds in marine environments. Studies in Avian Biol. No. 2. Cooper Ornithol. Soc. Lawrence, KA. 261pp.
- Palmer, R. S. 1967. Species accounts. Pages 143-267 in G. D. Stout, ed. The shorebirds of North America. Viking Press, New York. 270pp.

B172

---

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.