

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

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LONG-BILLED CURLEW

*Numenius americanus*

Family: SCOLOPACIDAE  
B173

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to fairly common breeder from April to September in wet meadow habitat in northeastern California in Siskiyou, Modoc, and Lassen cos. One recent nesting record for Owens Valley, Inyo Co. (McCaskie 1978). Uncommon to locally very common as a winter visitant from early July to early April along most of the California coast, and in the Central and Imperial valleys, where the largest flocks occur. Preferred winter habitats include large coastal estuaries, upland herbaceous areas, and croplands. On estuaries, feeding occurs mostly on intertidal mudflats. Small numbers of nonbreeders remain on coast in summer, and larger numbers remain in some years in the Central Valley (Cogswell 1977, Page et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Uses long bill to probe deep into substrate, or to grab prey from mud surface, while at times wading in belly-deep water. On Bolinas Lagoon, most important prey were mud crabs (*Hemigrapsus oregonensis*), ghost shrimp (*Callinassa californiensis*) and mud shrimp (*Upogebia pugettensis*). Also took insect pupae, gem clams (*Gemma gemma*), and small estuarine fish (Stenzel et al. 1976). Inland, takes insects (adults and larvae), worms, spiders, berries, crayfish, snails, and small crustaceans (Bent 1929). Occasionally takes nestling birds (Timken 1969).

**Cover:** At coastal estuaries, requires high salt marsh, pastures, salt ponds for roosting during high tide periods.

**Reproduction:** Breeds on grazed, mixed-grass and shortgrass prairies. Habitats on gravelly soils and gently rolling terrain are favored over others (Stewart 1975). Nest usually located in relatively flat areas with grass cover 10-20 cm (4-8 in) high. The nest is a sparsely lined depression, often remote from water (Palmer 1967). Nest often placed close to cover such as a grass clump, rock, or soil mound (Johnsgard 1981). In California, nests on elevated interior grasslands and wet meadows, usually adjacent to lakes or marshes (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

**Water:** No additional data found.

**Pattern:** Upland shortgrass prairies and wet meadows are used for nesting; coastal estuaries, open grasslands, and croplands are used in winter.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity. Probably feeds at night in estuarine habitats. In winter, makes periodic short flights from intertidal mudflats to high tide roosts, in coordination with the tide cycle.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Fall migrants begin arriving on central California coast in late June; by mid-April most have left for breeding grounds. Breeders present in northeastern California from April to September. Slightly higher numbers of migrants occur in fall than in the spring migration (Page et al. 1979).

**Home Range:** In eastern Washington, average nesting density was 1 pair/km<sup>2</sup> (2.5/mi<sup>2</sup>) (Fitzner 1978). Approximately 40 used Bolinas Lagoon in the nonbreeding season (Page et al. 1979). In winter, from 10-14/km<sup>2</sup> (25-35/mi<sup>2</sup>) fed on an intertidal mudflat outside of levees at Hayward (Swarth and Cogswell 1981).

**Territory:** Territory varies with topography and cover, from 20 ha (49 ac) in flat, open habitat to 6-8 ha (15-20 ac) in more diversified habitat (Johnsgard 1981). In Utah, nests were no closer than 460 m (1500 ft) (Forsythe 1970), but in dense populations they may be as close as 250 m (820 ft) (Johnsgard 1981). In favorable habitat, pairs may nest within sight of one another (Palmer 1967). Male defends nest territory.

**Reproduction:** Breeding season mid-April to September. Generally a solitary nester, but may be loosely colonial in favorable habitats. Mean clutch size 4 eggs; incubation period 27-28 days. Both members of a pair incubate; female mostly during day and male at night. Precocial young cared for by both parents, but female usually leaves when chicks are 2-3 wk old. Fledging Period 41-45 days (Johnsgard 1981).

**Niche:** Currently on Audubon Society's Blue List because of declining numbers, probably caused by agricultural practices (Tate 1981). Previously proposed as a candidate for Federal Endangered status. Breeding range has retracted considerably in the last 80 yr, but western populations have not decreased as much as those in eastern U.S.

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