

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

SURFBIRD

Aphriza virgata

Family: SCOLOPACIDAE
B179

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to abundant migrant and winter visitant on rocky intertidal areas of marine habitats along the outer coast, and occasionally in estuarine habitats. Common to abundant during peak fall (mid-August to mid-October) and spring (mid-March to mid-May) migration (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Begins arriving in California in early July. Fairly common in winter, but more widespread in northern than in southern California. In southern California, has a very local winter distribution, and is not common on the Channel Islands (Garrett and Dunn 1981). By mid-May most have departed for the northern breeding grounds. The only California records away from outer coast are 3 spring sightings at the Salton Sea, Imperial Co. (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Wintering individuals range from southeast Alaska along the Pacific coast to central Chile (Johnsgard 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: On breeding grounds, takes mostly flies and beetles (Dixon 1927). On the wintering grounds, feeds on mussels, periwinkles, barnacles, small crustaceans, and other marine invertebrates typical of the rocky intertidal habitat (Bent 1929). Feeds close to the water's edge on rocks, or stony beaches, by probing into small crevices, or by pecking for prey on the surface of rocks.

Cover: Requires undisturbed rocks, jetties, or other promontories for roosting during the high tide period when feeding zones are covered.

Reproduction: Breeds on alpine tundra above timberline in south central and western Alaska, and in the Yukon Territory, Canada. Very few nesting locations are known, and only a few nests have been located. Breeding habitat is alpine tundra, generally above 1220 m (4000 ft), near talus slopes. Nests in low, sparse cover of lichen, moss, and heather. Apparently the nest is a depression in the substrate, lined with bits of vegetation (Johnsgard 1981).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: In California, depends upon rocky, intertidal marine habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: In the Yukon Territory, leaves the nesting grounds in late July (Johnsgard 1981). Adults precede young (Palmer 1967). The earliest arrivals reach California in mid-July, but the major fall migratory passage through the state occurs from late August through mid-October. Spring migration takes place mainly from mid-March to early

May (McCaskie et al. 1979).

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Very little information available on reproductive biology. The first nest was found in Mt. McKinley National Park, Alaska, on 13 July, 1928 (Palmer 1967). Apparently monogamous, and nests are well separated (Palmer 1967). A nest with a full clutch of 4 eggs was found in late May, and other nests have been found in June. No information available on incubation or fledging. In Alaska, young observed in late June. Precocial young probably leave the nest within hours of hatching. Paired adults have been seen attending young chicks (Johnsgard 1981).

Niche: Little information available. Winters south to southern Argentina (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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