

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

LEAST SANDPIPER

Calidris minutilla

Family: SCOLOPACIDAE
B185

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: M. Rigney
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant winter visitant in California. Found from August to April along shores of aquatic habitats, in fresh and saline emergent wetlands, and wet pastures. Uncommon on sandy and rocky coasts the length of the state, but common in wetlands of the Central Valley. A very common and widespread transient and winter visitant in southern California, including the coastal region, the Salton Sea, and the Colorado River. A common migrant in northeastern California in April and May, becoming abundant July to October. Also found commonly at Sierra Nevada lakes July to August, and at southern California mountain lakes April to September. June is the only month when the species is uncommon throughout the state (Cogswell 1977, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds by searching, pecking, and probing (Baker and Baker 1973) in mud or soft earth for invertebrates including crustaceans, worms, adult insects, and insect larvae (Bent 1927). Also may take some seeds and other plant material. Prefers to feed along narrow channels, in mudholes, or along the edge of a marsh (Cogswell 1977).

Cover: Frequently roosts on barren levees, dikes, or islands at high tide. At such times, usually mixes with flocks of western sandpipers and dunlins, but remains on the fringes of such flocks.

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Nests throughout northern Canada and Alaska in sedge, grass, and mossy bogs. Nest is a shallow depression on the ground, lined with dry leaves or grass.

Water: Frequently bathes in tidepools or at the edge of ponds or lakes, and may drink.

Pattern: Prefers shores of aquatic habitats with abundant invertebrate food.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity. Migration occurs at night.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Wintering population mostly migrates to northern Canada and Alaska to breed April through July.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Territorial on breeding ground but territory size not reported.

Reproduction: Breeding begins in early to mid-June. A monogamous, solitary breeder

(Bent 1927). Clutch size usually 4 eggs, with a single brood each year (Harrison 1978). Incubation period 19-21 days; male takes a large part (Godfrey 1979). Nestlings are precocial and tended by both parents (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Of the small sandpipers, the least sandpiper stays closest to shore when feeding on mudflats at low tide (Cogswell 1977).

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