

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

ROCK SANDPIPER

Calidris ptilocnemis

Family: SCOLOPACIDAE
B190

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A very uncommon winter visitor (mid-October to mid-April) to rocky, intertidal marine habitats in northern and central California (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979). One or several may be seen with other rocky intertidal shorebirds such as turnstones and surfbirds. Found most consistently in California near Bodega Bay, Sonoma Co. (McCaskie et al. 1979). Casual visitor to rocky, outer coast in southern California, but none has been sighted there since 1971 (Garrett and Dunn 1981). The southernmost record in California is at San Pedro, Los Angeles Co. (Garrett and Dunn 1981), although there have been a few sightings along the coast of northwest Baja California (Peterson and Chalif 1973). Most individuals spend the winter north of California (Cogswell 1977).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Pecks and probes for intertidal invertebrates among the rocks and tidepools along the the outer coast. There is little information on diet in nonbreeding season. On the breeding grounds, takes gammarid amphipods, sand fleas, marine worms, and ice-bound sea-lice (Bent 1927). Stomachs from 192 individuals contained 35% mollusks, 29% crustaceans, 23% flies, and 10% beetles (Johnsgard 1981). Some stomachs also contained algae and seeds.

Cover: Undisturbed rock outcrops, offshore rocks, jetties, and other similar areas are needed by roosting individuals during the high tide periods.

Reproduction: Breeds near the coast from eastern Siberia to central western Alaska, and on the Aleutian Islands (Johnsgard 1981). Breeds on open, upland tundra up to 213 m (700 ft) above sea level, as well as on gravel beaches just beyond the high tide line (Johnsgard 1981). Nest is a deep depression lined with grasses and leaves (Harrison 1978).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Requires undisturbed, rocky intertidal habitat in nonbreeding season.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, mostly circadian activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Breeders at the southern edge of the range apparently migrate only short distances. Northern breeders pass beyond the southern populations and travel down the coast to winter as far south as central California (Palmer 1967). May appear on the nesting grounds by April (Hanna 1921).

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Although may appear on the breeding grounds in April, the first nests with eggs usually are not found until early June (Harrison 1978). Active nests also have been noted in late July, suggesting a relatively long nesting season. Renesting occurs if the first clutch is destroyed (Johnsgard 1981). Presumably a solitary nester. Average clutch contains 4 eggs. Incubation is by both parents and lasts about 20 days. Precocial young leave the nest within hours of hatching. Tended by both parents, especially the male (Harrison 1978). No information on age at first flight available (Johnsgard 1981).

Niche: Swims readily but not often (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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