

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

BONAPARTE'S GULL

Larus philadelphia

Family: LARIDAE
B211

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common transient and winter visitor to coastal California, especially from Sonoma Co. southward (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979). Less commonly, it reaches interior localities, especially in migration (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Coastally it frequents open seashores, bays, emergent wetlands, salt ponds, offshore waters, and islands, including the Channel Islands (Cogswell 1977, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Most interior records are rivers, lakes, sewage ponds, and the Salton Sea (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Although principally a winter visitor and migrant in the state, stragglers have been recorded throughout the summer (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: This small gull feeds mostly in flight. Important winter foraging areas are surflines, zones of mixing tidal currents, and waste-water outlets (Cogswell 1977). It takes insects and fish from estuaries and bogs, and scavenges at wharves and harbors where it also eats crustaceans and marine worms (Bent 1921). Frequently scavenges from sewage plant tanks and outfalls (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Food primarily is picked from the water surface, but where calm, swims and pecks at bits of refuse (Cogswell 1977). Also catches insects in air, or plunges beneath the water surface chasing prey. Inland, feeds mostly on insects (Terres 1980).

Cover: Spends most of its time in graceful tern-like flight, but also lands on calm bodies of water or shorelines (Bent 1921).

Reproduction: Breeds in Alaska and Canada, but not in California (Dawson 1923). Nests are in spruce-fir forests at various heights (1.3-6.1 m; 4.0-20.0 ft) from the ground. They are constructed from small sticks, grasses, mosses, leaves, and down (Bent 1921). Nests are saddled on horizontal branches, and usually are near or above water (Terres 1980).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Frequents coastal habitats, and larger bodies of water inland.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity. Active and graceful fliers and swimmers.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Arrives from northern breeding grounds in late August and September and remains in California through May. During these months, moves about in search of productive feeding areas. Stragglers remain through the summer, but mostly migrates northward to breed.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: The breeding season begins in mid-June and extends through July (Terres 1980). Pair nests alone, or in small colonies, and lays 2-4 eggs (Terres 1980, Harrison 1978). Single-brooded; incubation is by both sexes, but likely mostly by the female. Incubation apparently about 24 days. The young are semiprecocial and begin to leave the nest after 1 wk (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Wetland feeding areas are critical to this species. As with other coastal species, vulnerable to oil spills from offshore drilling.

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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.