

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

HEERMANN'S GULL

Larus heermanni

Family: LARIDAE
B212

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

In California, a common visitor in summer and fall when postbreeders disperse from southern nesting grounds (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Occurs in marine habitats, rocky intertidal areas, river mouths, bays, lagoons and offshore islands (including the Channel Islands), northern commonly as far as Monterey Bay (Cogswell 1977). Numbers decline in winter, and occurs irregularly through spring, especially in northern coastal areas (McCaskie et al. 1979). The species is rare as a nonbreeder at the Salton Sea, where it is seen most often in July (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Nesting attempts have been recorded a few times in California (Garrett and Dunn 1981); a pair nested on Alcatraz Island in 1980 (McCaskie et al. 1988).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Preferred feeding areas are offshore kelp beds (Dawson 1923), rocky shorelines, and sandy beaches (Cogswell 1977). Eats marine fishes, shrimps, mollusks, and crustaceans, as well as scavenging shorelines with other gulls (Bent 1921). Fish are captured near the water surface by approaching from behind and making quick dips into unsuspecting schools (Dawson 1923). Also steals food captured by other species such as pelicans and sea otters (Cogswell 1977).

Cover: Floats on the ocean surface and loafs on pieces of driftwood. On shore, stands on sandy beaches or rocky intertidal areas, usually with other species of gulls (Dawson 1923).

Reproduction: Breeds on islands off the coast of Baja California and Mexico (Dwight 1925), where nests have been found north as far as San Benito Island (28° 20') (Jehl 1976). Nests are built from sticks, dry grasses, herbs, and sometimes lined with feathers. Nests usually hidden between boulders or bunchgrasses (Bent 1921).

Water: The species does not frequent fresh water areas (Grinnell and Miller 1944). It bathes in, and apparently drinks, seawater; as other ocean birds, its nasal glands excrete excess salt into the nostrils (Cogswell 1977).

Pattern: In California, frequents marine habitats, especially areas with abundant kelp beds.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity. Feeds in daylight, but spends much of the day loafing on the water, or on rocky or sandy areas.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Most common in coastal California from late June through November. It is the only North American gull that migrates southward to breed, and

northward again in large numbers for fall and winter (Bent 1921).

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Nests from March through June in Mexico. Colonies of up to 15,000 have been reported (Bent 1921). Clutches usually contain 2-3 eggs (Jehl 1976, Terres 1980).

Incubation period and age when young fledge are unknown (Terres 1980).

Niche: Vulnerable to human disturbance of island nesting rookeries, and to oil spills from offshore drilling.

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