

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

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MEW GULL

*Larus canus*

Family: LARIDAE  
B213

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A winter visitor to California; irregularly common to abundant along the central coast (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979). Numbers decline coastally south of Monterey Bay (Cogswell 1977). However, locally fairly common in Ventura Co. and on northern Channel Islands (Garrett and Dunn 1981), and rare but regular south to San Diego Co. (Devillers et al. 1971). Arrives in California in September; most abundant in mid-winter, and largely has departed for northern breeding grounds by May (Cogswell 1977). Coastally, frequents areas of turbulent water such as river mouths, waste-water disposal sites, harbors, and surfines (Cogswell 1977), but also travels out into open, pelagic waters (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Uncommon in the Central Valley (Gaines 1974, Manolis and Webb 1977), although a few regularly occur in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Devillers et al. 1971). In the interior of southern California, has been recorded only at the Salton Sea (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Flies in light, graceful flight picking small fishes from water (Terres 1980), but also may dive at prey from above, or forage while swimming on the water (Cogswell 1977). In coastal areas, scavenges at harbors, searches mudflats, sandy or rocky areas, for mollusks, crustaceans, and echinoderms (Bent 1921). Inland, it feeds on lakes, emergent wetlands, and croplands for worms and insect larvae (Terres 1980). Unlike other gulls, rarely visits landfill dumps (Cogswell 1977).

**Cover:** Rests on bayside mudflats, sandy beaches, and alights on calm waters. Perhaps because of smaller size, often roosts and feeds apart from larger *Larus* species (Dawson 1923).

**Reproduction:** Breeds in Alaska and northern Canada; nests are never far from water (Bent 1921). Ground nests are built on sea cliffs, sandy beaches, wet tundra and gravel bars of interior rivers. Platforms may be constructed in trees or bushes near lakes or marshes (Terres 1980). Common nesting materials include seaweeds, grasses, herb stalks, and heather (Bent 1921).

**Water:** No additional data found.

**Pattern:** In California, this wintering gull principally is a bird of turbulent, coastal waters. Inland, frequents major lakes and rivers.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity. May move far offshore into pelagic waters (Grinnell and Miller 1944), but more commonly remains inshore (Bent 1921). Feeds actively

by day in light, graceful flight (Bent 1921).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Arrives from northern breeding grounds in September, and winters in California (Cogswell 1977). Mostly has departed by May, but a few nonbreeding stragglers may remain through the summer (McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Nesting occurs from May through July. Pair sometimes nests solitarily, but more often colonial (Terres 1980). Clutch size 1-4 eggs; usually 3. Single-brooded (Harrison 1978); incubation is by both parents and lasts 22-27 days. Young are semiprecocial, leaving nest after 1-2 days, but remaining nearby. Juveniles are tended by both parents, and fly well by about 5 wk (Harrison 1978).

Niche: This small gull may be excluded from potential feeding sites at harbors and landfills by large gulls (Dawson 1923). As all seabirds, it is vulnerable to oil spills.

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