

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

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO

Coccyzus americanus

Family: CUCULIDAE

Order: CUCULIFORMES

Class: AVES

B259

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to rare summer resident of valley foothill and desert riparian habitats in scattered locations in California. Along the Colorado River, breeding population on California side was estimated at 180 pairs in 1977 (Gaines 1977a). Additional pairs reside in the Sacramento and Owens valleys; along the South Fork of the Kern River, Kern Co.; along the Santa Ana River, Riverside Co.; and along the Amargosa River, Inyo and San Bernardino cos. Also may nest along San Luis Rey River, San Diego Co. Formerly much more common and widespread throughout lowland California, but numbers drastically reduced by habitat loss (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Gaines 1974b, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Current population estimations show about 50 pairs existing in California (Hughes 1999).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Gleans grasshoppers, cicadas, caterpillars and other larger insects from foliage. Occasionally preys on frogs or lizards, or feeds on fruit (Bent 1940, Preble 1957).

Cover: Densely foliated, deciduous trees and shrubs, especially willows, required for roosting sites.

Reproduction: Nests in dense cover as above; nest is a flimsy, open cup of twigs built on horizontal limb of tree or shrub at height of 0.6 to 7.8 m (2-25 ft).

Water: Restricted when breeding to riverbottoms and other mesic habitats where humidity is high.

Pattern: Inhabits extensive deciduous riparian thickets or forests with dense, low-level or understory foliage, and which abut on slow-moving watercourses, backwaters, or seeps. Willow almost always a dominant component of the vegetation. In Sacramento Valley, also utilizes adjacent orchards, especially of walnut. Along Colorado River, may inhabit mesquite thickets where willow is absent. Nests typically in sites with at least some willow, dense low-level or understory foliage, high humidity, and wooded foraging spaces in excess of 93 m (300 ft) in width and 10 ha (25 ac) in area (Gaines 1974b, 1977a).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Usually arrives from South American wintering areas in June, and departs by late August or early September.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: No information found.

Reproduction: In California, most eggs laid mid-June to mid-July. Monogamous; clutch averages 3-4 eggs (range 1-5). Both sexes incubate; incubation lasts 9-11 days and hatching is asynchronous. Both sexes care for altricial young. Young may leave nest at 6-9 days (Bent 1940, Hamilton and Hamilton 1965).

Niche: Numbers in California and other western areas have declined markedly in recent decades with destruction of riparian habitats (Laymon and Halterman 1987).

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