

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

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GREATER ROADRUNNER

*Geococcyx californianus*

Family: CUCULIDAE

Order: CUCULIFORMES

Class: AVES

B260

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A yearlong resident in arid, brushy habitats below about 900 m (3000 ft) in coast ranges, foothills and valleys exclusive of cultivated and inhabited floor of Central Valley, from eastern Mendocino, Tehama and Shasta cos. south, reaching seacoast in central and southern California; below about 1500 m (5000 ft) in deserts and desert ranges from Benton, Mono Co. and Deep Springs Valley, Inyo Co. south. Fairly common in all desert habitats, and uncommon in a variety of other habitats, including coastal scrub, chamise-redshank and mixed chaparral, and valley foothill hardwood and montane hardwood-conifer habitats. Very scarce and local in northern California, uncommon in coastal southern California, and fairly common in deserts, especially to south (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Hunts lizards, snakes, grasshoppers, other large invertebrates, mice, and sometimes birds, by chasing and capturing them on the ground. Occasionally eats eggs and nestlings of birds, and rarely seeds and fruits (Bent 1940).

**Cover:** Requires thickets, large bushes, or small trees for shade, refuge, and roosting.

**Reproduction:** Compact, open-cup nest of sticks about 0.3 m (1 ft) across, usually built in low tree, shrub thicket, or clump of cactus, at height of 0.9 to 4.6 m (3-15 ft); rarely on ground.

**Water:** Drinks water where available, but it is uncertain whether water is required. Miller and Stebbins (1964) suggested this species "not bothered . . . by lack of water".

**Pattern:** Most numerous in open areas mixed with tracts of brush, in arid, open land with scattered bushes or thickets, or in chaparral edging on sparsely vegetated grassland. Conversely, absent from extensive stands of unbroken chaparral, grassland, or sparsely vegetated desert (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** None reported.

**Home Range:** Probably equal to territory size. Bryant (1916) reported a "mean home range" of "several square miles" in California. Density estimates range from 1 pair per 100 ha (250 ac) in desert riparian habitat in southern Nevada (Austin 1970) to 12 males per 100 ha (250 ac) in southern Texas brushland (Roth 1977). Cardiff (1978) noted 5 per 100 ha (250 ac) in Mojave yucca-cholla desert scrub.

Territory: In Texas, Folse and Arnold (1978) found a mean territory size (diameter?) of 0.7 km (0.4 mi), range 0.4-1.0 km (0.2-0.6 mi). Calder's (1968a) data suggested a territory diameter of 0.8 km (0.5 mi).

Reproduction: Peak of egg-laying April and early May. Monogamous; clutch averages 3-5 eggs (range 2-8). Incubation 16-20 days, apparently mostly by male; hatching is asynchronous. Both sexes care for altricial young, which leave nest about 18-30 days after hatching (Woods 1960, Calder 1967, Ohmart 1973).

Niche: Snakes and mammals prey on young and eggs (Folse and Arnold 1978).

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