

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

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NORTHERN PYGMY OWL

*Glaucidium gnoma*

Family: STRIGIDAE  
B267

Order: STRIGIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to fairly common, yearlong resident of most forest habitats in California, especially valley foothill hardwood, mixed conifer, valley foothill riparian, and montane riparian. Most commonly found along edges near meadows, streams, lakes, and other openings. Distributed from sea level to 3600 m (0-12,000 ft) the length of the state, excluding the Modoc Plateau, Central Valley, and treeless desert areas. Usually scarce above 1800 m (6000 ft).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats mice, chipmunks, other small mammals, and small birds; also takes lizards, arthropods, and snakes. Birds eaten more frequently in nesting period. Swoops or pounces on prey on ground; also catches prey in thickets and trees; also hawks arthropods. Apparently does not swallow much hair, feathers, or bone, so pellets usually not formed. May cache portions of larger prey.

**Cover:** Frequents sparse to intermediate canopy cover; uses cavities in trees and snags for roosting and nesting.

**Reproduction:** Nests in abandoned woodpecker hole (especially those of acorn woodpecker), or natural cavity. Nest height usually 2-23 m (6-75 ft) above the ground, average 12 m (40 ft) (Karalus and Eckert 1974). Minimum dbh of tree or snag used for nesting estimated to be 30.5 cm (12 in) by Thomas (1979).

**Water:** No data found.

**Pattern:** Uses most forest habitats, especially edges and openings; requires stands with snags and trees with woodpecker holes and other cavities.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, circadian activity. Considerable diurnal activity; much crepuscular hunting activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Not migratory. May move upslope or downslope in response to weather conditions.

**Home Range:** No data found.

**Territory:** No data found.

**Reproduction:** Breeds mostly from April through August; peak May through July (Bent

1938). Clutch size 2-7, usually 3-4. Incubation probably 25-30 days. Female incubates, feeds, and tends young; male brings food to female. Semialtricial young hatch asynchronously, as is typical of owls.

Niche: One of the few owls regularly active diurnally. Predators include great horned owls, great gray owls, and goshawks. Competes with other secondary cavity-nesters, including other small owls and American kestrels.

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