

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

LONG-EARED OWL

Asio otus

Family: STRIGIDAE

Order: STRIGIFORMES

Class: AVES

B272

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Uncommon yearlong resident throughout the state except the Central Valley and Southern California deserts where it is an uncommon winter visitor. throughout the state. Riparian habitat required; also uses live oak thickets and other dense stands of trees. Resident populations in the state have been declining since the 1940s, especially in southern California (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Remsen 1978). Shuford and Fitton (1998) suggested populations of *A. otus* are still abundant in the Great Basin regions of California. All reasons for decline not known, but destruction and fragmentation of riparian habitat and live oak groves have been major factors (Remsen 1978). Urban development and agriculture have been the major causes for decline in coastal southern California (Bloom 1994).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats mostly voles and other rodents, occasionally birds, including smaller owls, and other vertebrates. Searches for prey in low, gliding flight; pounces on prey on ground. Usually hunts in open areas, occasionally in woodland and forested habitats.

Cover: Riparian or other thickets with small, densely canopied trees required for roosting and nesting.

Reproduction: Uses old crow, magpie, hawk, heron, and squirrel nest in a variety of trees with dense canopy. Nest usually 3-15 m (10-50 ft) above ground, rarely on ground or in tree or snag cavity (Karalus and Eckert 1974). Breeds from valley foothill hardwood up to ponderosa pine habitats.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Frequents dense, riparian and live oak thickets near meadow edges, and nearby woodland and forest habitats. Also found in dense conifer stands at higher elevations.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, nocturnal activity (Marti 1976).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Apparently makes only local movements in California, although some migration may occur. Often congregates in winter flocks, perhaps including family groups. May be seasonal movement westward from Sierra Nevada foothills in fall. Small (1974) reported irregular wandering of groups in winter.

Home Range: In Wyoming, breeding home range in riparian habitat varied from 34-106 ha (83-262 ac), and averaged 51 ha (134 ac) (Craighead and Craighead 1956).

Territory: Few data found. Apparently does not defend space outside immediate vicinity of nest. Hunting grounds may be shared by adults from different nests (Marks et al. 1994).

Reproduction: Breeding extends from early March to late July. One brood per yr from a clutch of 3-8 eggs, usually 4-5. Eggs usually laid in April and May; incubation 21 -28 days, by female; male feeds. Nestlings fledge in about 50 days or less. Approximately 93% of eggs resulted in fledged young in Wyoming (Craighead and Craiahead 1956). May nest in loose colonies.

Niche: Northern harriers may compete for prey; red-shouldered hawks may compete for nest sites (Wilson 1938). Great horned owls may prey on young.

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