

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

LESSER NIGHTHAWK

Chordeiles acutipennis

Family: CAPRIMULGIDAE
B275

Order: CAPRIMULGIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: M. Green
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: D. Winkler, R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon summer resident in arid lowlands, primarily in desert scrub, desert succulent shrub, desert wash, and alkali desert scrub habitats. Also forages over grasslands, desert riparian, and other habitats with high densities of flying insects. Occurs north in the Sacramento Valley to Tehama Co. (Grinnell and Miller 1944) and southern Shasta Co., and to lower Mono Co. east of the Sierra Nevada (McCaskie et al. 1979). More common in desert areas of southeastern California. Casual in winter mostly in southeastern deserts. Transients sometimes noted on the Channel Islands in spring and summer, and rare in spring on Farallon Islands (DeSante and Ainley 1980).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds on insects, which it hawks on long, low flights over open areas. Also makes short flights from the ground in the manner of a common poorwill (Bent 1940).

Cover: Nests and roosts on bare sand and gravel surfaces; desert floor, along washes; sometimes uses levees and dikes for nesting. Forages over grasslands, open riparian areas, agricultural lands, and similar open habitats where insects thrive.

Reproduction: Nests in the open on gravelly or sandy substrate. Also uses dikes and levees for nesting.

Water: May drink while skimming over water surface (Bent 1940).

Pattern: Undisturbed gravel or sand surface for roosting and nesting; open lowlands, riparian areas, agricultural fields, or other insect-rich areas for foraging.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Mostly a crepuscular and nocturnal forager; occasionally feeds in morning; roosts in the daytime. May become torpid in cold weather or when insects scarce.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Arrives in California in April from Mexico and Central America (Bent 1940). Numbers increase rapidly, then diminish in August; mostly gone by mid-September. A few may overwinter in southern desert areas (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Rare but regular in spring on Farallon Islands (DeSante and Ainley 1980).

Home Range: Ranges far from nest in search of food (Caccamise 1974).

Territory: No data found. Little territorial behavior has been observed (Caccamise 1974), but may exclude common nighthawk from desert habitats (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Reproduction: Nests from April through July, with peak activity in May and early June. Monogamous and solitary nester. Female incubates 2 eggs for 18-19 days; may raise 2 broods in a season (Pickwell and Smith 1938). Young are semiprecocial, and tended by both sexes (Harrison 1978). Young can walk soon after hatching; are fully feathered in 12 days, and fledge in about 3 wk.

Niche: Eggs and unfledged young subject to predation from mammals and snakes.

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B275

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