

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

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BLACK SWIFT

*Cypseloides niger*

Family: APODIDAE  
B279

Order: APODIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Breeds very locally in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range, the San Gabriel, San Bernardino, and San Jacinto Mts., and in coastal bluffs and mountains from San Mateo Co. south probably to San Luis Obispo Co. Nests in moist crevice or cave on sea cliffs above the surf, or on cliffs behind, or adjacent to, waterfalls in deep canyons. Forages widely over many habitats. In migration, rare and irregular outside the breeding range; does not winter in the state (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Remsen 1978, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds exclusively on flying insects, captured in sustained, long-distance foraging flights, usually high in the air. Often pursues insects in updrafts associated with cliffs or storm fronts.

**Cover:** Apparently the only regular resting places are on steep, rocky, often moist, cliffs such as those used for nesting (Bent 1940).

**Reproduction:** Builds nest in moist location on sea cliff above surf, or on cliff behind, or adjacent to, waterfall in deep canyon. Nest constructed of mud mixed with moss, ferns, seaweed, or other plant materials; located in deep, dark crevice, in cave, or under overhang (Bent 1940). Nests in colony of a few pairs. Nest usually kept moist by mist from the surf or waterfall.

**Water:** Required at nest, as described above, and possibly at roost, but it is not known whether drinking water is required.

**Pattern:** If there are suitable nest sites for breeding, will forage over almost any terrain and habitat. Seems to avoid arid regions, however, such as the Great Basin, southern deserts, and Central Valley.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Diurnal activity, including in migration. Other swifts undergo periods of torpor in cold weather, when flying insects are scarce (Terres 1980), and black swift may do the same.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Migrates south for the winter; mostly absent from October through April. Noted rarely and irregularly outside the breeding range, mostly west of the Great Basin and southern deserts.

**Home Range:** Home range very large (Bent 1940, Grinnell and Miller 1944), but has not been measured.

Territory: Territoriality has not been reported for this species; territory presumably limited to nest site.

Reproduction: Breeding season lasts from early June to late August. Usually nests in small colony. Lays only 1 large egg per yr (Harrison 1978). Incubation lasts 24-27 days. Altricial young leave the nest at about 45 days (Hunter and Baldwin 1962), but nestling period probably highly variable as in other swifts. Young can go without food for long periods (Terres 1980).

Niche: Nests are inaccessible to terrestrial predators and human disturbance, with the exception of rockclimbers, who rarely use these wet cliffs.

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