

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

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD

Selasphorus platycercus

Family: TROCHILIDAE

Order: APODIFORMES

Class: AVES

B290

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common summer resident of southern California, breeding in the higher mountains of the northern deserts. Occurs primarily in open stands of montane riparian, montane chaparral (mountain mahogany), pinyon-juniper, and mixed conifer habitats. Nesting takes place in the White, Panamint, Grapevine, Kingston, and Clark Mts. (Garrett and Dunn 1981), and in the Inyo Mts. (Grinnell and Miller 1944). It is suspected in other Mojave Desert ranges. Recent records from the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada, north into Mono Co., suggest that the breeding range has expanded (Johnson and Garrett 1974, Gaines 1977b). A few recent records from northern California (McCaskie et al. 1988).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Nectar-producing flowers are required as a source of insects and spiders as well as nectar. Arthropods are important foods; often taken in midair as well as from flowers. Occasionally eats sap from sapsucker holes.

Cover: Uses shrubs and trees for cover, especially favors thickets of willow, Garrya, and other plants along streams and dry streambeds.

Reproduction: Builds a nest of plant fibers and spider webs, located on horizontal branches or twigs, usually at low levels in riparian shrubs or trees. Nest also found in a variety of shrubs and trees in adjacent habitats, at height of 1-9 m (3-30 ft) (Bent 1940).

Water: Regularly bathes and drinks at mountain streams (Bent 1940). Water may be required.

Pattern: Centers activity around concentrations of nectar-producing flowering shrubs and herbs, usually near streams or dry streambeds. For cover and nesting, prefers thickets of willow, Garrya, or other plants, but uses a variety of open, brushy or wooded habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Winters in Mexico; most depart California before August, and do not return until early May. A few are observed in August and April. A rare and irregular transient outside the breeding range.

Home Range: Breeding density in mixed-conifer forests in Arizona was 14.3 per 100 ha (250 ac) (Franzreb 1975) and, in another study area, 5.3 per 40 ha (100 ac) the first year, and 30.8 per 40 ha the next year (Franzreb and Ohmart 1978). Miller (1940) found as many as 5 males in a patch of brush 180 m (600 ft) long.

Territory: Feeding territory in Arizona, which centered around flowering plants, averaged 0.2 ha (0.5 ac) during peak flowering periods. Some territories increased in size as flower density decreased (Lyon 1973). Aggression was directed at bees as well as hummingbirds.

Reproduction: Breeding season extends from May through August. A promiscuous, solitary nester; usually 2 eggs per clutch. Possibly 2 broods per yr. Incubation lasts about 16 days. Altricial young first fly at about 23 days (Bent 1940, Harrison 1978, Terres 1980). Female performs all nesting duties.

Niche: Dunford and Dunford (1972) reported aggressive encounters with migrant rufous hummingbirds at flowering Penstemon. Calder (1972) observed stealing of materials from a western wood-pewee nest, and a warbling vireo stealing materials from a broad-tailed hummingbird nest. Females can be long-lived.

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