

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

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD

Selasphorus rufus

Family: TROCHILIDAE

Order: APODIFORMES

Class: AVES

B291

Written by: M. Green

Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt

Edited by: R. Duke, S. Granholm

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common migrant and uncommon summer resident of California. A rare, but probably regular, winter resident in southern California (Garrett and Dunn 1981). A common breeder in Oregon and Washington, and breeding in the Trinity Mts. of Trinity and Humboldt cos. has been confirmed in recent years (McCaskie et al. 1979, 1988). Many postbreeders migrate south through the Cascade Range and Sierra Nevada in summer, although spring migration mostly is through the lowlands and foothills (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Found in a wide variety of habitats that provide nectar-producing flowers; uses valley foothill hardwood, valley foothill hardwood-conifer, riparian, and various chaparral habitats in both northward and southward migration; montane riparian, aspen, and high mountain meadows (to tree-line and above) used in southward migration. More common in the southern deserts in southward than in northward migration. On the Channel Islands, a rare spring migrant (Garrett and Dunn 1981). On the Farallon Islands, very rare in spring and uncommon in fall (DeSante and Ainley 1980).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Takes nectar from many species of flowering plants; also eats insects, spiders and tree sap. Hovers while taking nectar and insects, which it gleans from foliage and flowers; also hawks insects from air.

Cover: Trees and shrubs in many habitats provide cover, including lowland riparian, open woodlands, scrub, and chaparral, also mountain meadows extending to and above treeline (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Reproduction: Breeding areas north of California in coniferous forests (Johnsgard 1983); nest variously placed in berry tangles, shrubs, and conifers. Nest is an open cup, usually on a sloping branch near ground (Harrison 1978). Probably uses similar sites in northwestern California. May rebuild on old nest.

Water: Drinks by hovering over water, or by sitting in shallow water, and dipping bill (Bent 1940). Nectar also a major water source.

Pattern: Uses riparian areas, open woodlands, chaparral, mountain meadows, and other habitats rich in nectar-producing flowers, including gardens and orchards.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Arrives in February and migrates north through lowlands and foothills until mid-April (south) and early May (north); a few remain in the state. Postbreeder males begin to migrate back through California in late June and early July. This

early appearance of males in the Sierra Nevada has led some observers to suspect breeding. Fall migration also takes this species into desert areas. Most individuals are gone by mid-September, but a few regularly overwinter, particularly in southern California.

Home Range: No data on home range found. In British Columbia, Horvath (1964) recorded 7-105 nests per 40 ha (100 ac) in various vegetation types.

Territory: Armitage (1955) reported 5 feeding territories of migrants varying from 3.3-37 m² (36-400 ft²).

Reproduction: Nesting recently confirmed in northwestern mt. ranges. In Oregon, the breeding season extends from late April through July. Perhaps less promiscuous than other North American hummingbirds; males have been observed incubating (Johnsgard 1983). Female sometimes nests close to others in favorable areas. Usually 2 eggs laid; occasionally 1 or 3. No reports of double-brooding found. Incubation period unknown, but probably close to other *Selasphorus* (16-22 days for Allen's hummingbird). Altricial young tended by female until fledging at 22 days. Female performs most nesting duties.

Niche: Merlins sometimes prey on this species (Bent 1940). Owls, other hawks, and weasels are suspected predators. Greatest danger probably unseasonable cold that kill nectar sources and insects. Hummingbirds are important pollinators of specially adapted plants.

REFERENCES

- Armitage, K. B. 1955. Territorial behavior in fall migrant rufous hummingbirds. *Condor* 57:239-240.
- Bent, A. C. 1940. Life histories of North American cuckoos, goatsuckers, hummingbirds, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 176. 506pp.
- DeSante, D. F., and D. G. Ainley. 1980. The avifauna of the South Farallon Islands, California. *Studies in Avian Biol. No. 4.* Cooper Ornithol. Soc., Lawrence, KA. 104pp.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The birder's handbook.* Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. *Birds of southern California.* Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. *Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27.* 608pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. *A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of north American birds.* W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland, OH. 416pp.
- Horvath, O. 1964. Seasonal differences in rufous hummingbird nest height and their relation to nest climate. *Ecology* 45:235-241.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1983. *The hummingbirds of North America.* Smithsonian Inst. Press, Washington DC. 303pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. *Birds of northern California, an annotated field list.* 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1988. *Birds of northern California, an annotated field list.* 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. Reprinted with suppl. 108pp. in the *Rocky Mountains.* *Condor* 78:133-134.