

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

GILA WOODPECKER

Melanerpes uropygialis

Family: PICIDAE
B297

Order: PICIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to fairly common resident in southern California along the Colorado River, and locally near Brawley, Imperial Co. Occurs mostly in desert riparian and desert wash habitats, but also found in orchard-vineyard and urban habitats, particularly in shade trees and date palm groves. Formerly found in farm and ranchyards throughout the Imperial Valley, but most regularly now near Brawley. Numbers have declined greatly in southern California in recent decades (Remsen 1978, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats insects, mistletoe berries, cactus fruits, corn (Gilman 1915, Ehrlich et al. 1988), and occasionally contents of galls on cottonwood leaves, bird eggs, acorns, cactus pulp (Speich and Radke 1975). Gleans from trunks and branches of trees and shrubs.

Cover: Cottonwoods and other desert riparian trees, shade trees, and date palms supply cover in California. Saguaros are important habitat elements outside of California, but are scarce within the state and are not so important.

Reproduction: Nests in cavity in riparian tree or saguaro.

Water: No data found. Characteristically forages and nests in riparian areas in California.

Pattern: Groves of riparian trees, planted shade trees, and date palm orchards provide cover.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Resident within California. May wander in nonbreeding seasons. There are 2 old records in southern, coastal California.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found on territory size, but reportedly highly defensive of territory against all avian intruders (Gilman 1915), particularly northern flickers and European starlings (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Emlen (1974) found 0.3 pair per 40 ha (100 ac) near Tucson, Arizona.

Reproduction: Breeds from April through July, with peak activity in April and May. Apparently a monogamous and solitary breeder; both sexes incubate the 3-5 eggs for about 14 days. Sometimes 2 broods are raised in a season. Nestlings altricial and naked (Harrison 1978).

Niche: European starlings compete for nest sites; old nest holes also used by owls, American kestrel and purple martin. Loss and fragmentation of riparian woodland to development, and competition for nest holes from European starlings, apparently are major factors contributing to the decline in numbers in California in recent decades (Remsen 1978).

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