

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

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DUSKY FLYCATCHER

*Empidonax oberholseri*

Family: TYRANNIDAE  
B318

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to common, summer resident in open forests and shrublands with scattered conifers. Generally breeds above 1500 m (5000 ft) throughout interior California, including the mountain ranges of the northern deserts. In the North Coast Ranges, nests from the Oregon border south to Mt. Sanhedrin, Mendocino Co., and farther south. Small populations apparently breed in the Santa Lucia Mts., Monterey Co., and in the San Benito Mts. (McCaskie et al. 1988). Preferred nesting habitats include lodgepole pine, subalpine conifer, Jeffrey pine, eastside pine, aspen, and montane chaparral. Uncommon spring and fall transient throughout interior California; rare along the coast (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Makes short sallies for flying insects over brushy or open terrain from low, exposed perches. Foraging perches usually on shrubs or low branches of trees, but sometimes high in trees.

**Cover:** Prefers low-growing trees and tall shrubs under scattered taller trees. Canopy trees may be used for high singing posts and look-out perches.

**Reproduction:** Nest an open cup of grasses and other plant fibers located in upright crotch of small tree or shrub 0.8 to 6 m (2.5 to 20 ft) above ground, but usually less than 1.8 m (6 ft) (Bent 1942).

**Water:** Water apparently not required (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

**Pattern:** Nesters most numerous in mixed brush and trees, or where open forests edge on shrub-covered slopes and clearings (Gaines 1977b).

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Mostly arrives from Mexico in April and May, and departs breeding areas by August.

**Home Range:** Home range probably equal to territory. In Colorado, Eckhardt (1977) recorded an average breeding density over 3 yr of 4-8 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac)

**Territory:** In Montana, Manuwal (1970) reported an average breeding territory of 1.6 ha (4 ac), varying from 1.4 to 1.9 ha (3.5 to 4.7 ac). In California, Johnson (1963) presented a rough map of 6 territories, each about 1.2 to 2.4 ha (3-6 ac) in size.

Reproduction: Monogamous; peak of egg laying in late June. Clutch averages 3-4 eggs; probably single brooded. Incubation 12-15 days. Altricial young cared for by both sexes. Fledging at about 18 days (Bent 1942).

Niche: Rare host to brown-headed cowbird nest parasitism. Very difficult to differentiate from Hammond's flycatcher and gray flycatcher. Most reliable criteria for field identification are song, nesting behavior, and habitat preference (Johnson 1963, Gaines 1977b).

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