

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

GRAY FLYCATCHER

Empidonax wrightii

Family: TYRANNIDAE
B319

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common summer resident at about 1700-2500 m (5500-8000 ft) in sagebrush and bitterbrush habitats east of Cascade-Sierra crest from the Oregon border south to Inyo, Grapevine and Panamint Mts., Inyo Co. Also breeds locally on desert slopes of southern Sierra Nevada and San Bernardino Mts., and probably on Clark Mt., San Bernardino Co. Preferred nesting habitat is extensive stands of large sagebrush, but also breeds where there is a mixture of brush, ponderosa pine, pinyon pine, juniper, and other woody plants. Uncommon spring (May) and fall (September) transient in scrub and woodland habitats throughout the Great Basin and southeastern deserts, and along the Colorado River. A very rare transient west of the Sierra Nevada, along the coast, and on the Channel Islands; more spring than fall records. Rare winter resident along Colorado River, with scattered records elsewhere in lowland southern California (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Garrett and Dunn 1981, McCaskie et al. 1988).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Makes short sallies for flying insects, usually from exposed perches in tall shrubs.

Cover: Prefers large, dense shrubs for roosting and nesting, and tall shrubs for hunting perches.

Reproduction: Bulky, ragged, rather loosely built open-cup nest of herb stems and down, pieces of bark, grasses, placed in crotch of a large, dense sagebrush or other shrub or small tree at height of 0.6 to 1.5 m (2-5 ft) (Bent 1942, Russell and Woodbury 1941).

Water: No specific information found; may not be a requirement.

Pattern: Nesters most numerous in extensive tracts of large, mature sagebrush and associated shrubs (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Arrives from Mexican wintering areas mostly in May and departs breeding areas in August.

Home Range: In Arizona, Russell and Woodbury (1941) found that breeders stayed within 93 m (300 ft) of nest. In breeding season, home range probably equal to territory. In Oregon, a breeding density of 25 pairs per 100 ha (250 ac) was reported in Friedmann et al. (1977). Density on 3 Mono Co. study areas ranged from 1.2 to 9.5 individuals per 40 ha (100 ac)

(Weston and Johnston 1980).

Territory: In California, Johnson (1963) reported territory sizes of 1.2 to 3.6 ha (3-9 ac).

Reproduction: Monogamous; peak of egg-laying in June. Incubation 14 days, by female. Clutch 3-4 eggs. May raise 2 broods in Arizona. Both sexes care for altricial young. Fledging age about 16 days (Bent 1942, Russell and Woodbury 1941).

Niche: In Oregon, Friedmann et al. (1977) found 20-30% of nests parasitized by brown-headed cowbird. Very difficult to differentiate from Hammond's flycatcher and dusky flycatcher. Most reliable criteria for field identification are song, nesting behavior, and habitat preference (Johnson 1963, Gaines 1977b).

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