

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

BLACK PHOEBE

Sayornis nigricans

Family: TYRANNIDAE
B321

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant, yearlong resident of riparian habitats in cismontane California. Found in valley foothill, montane, and desert riparian habitats, usually below 1200 m (4000 ft), but has been found up to 2700 m (9000 ft) after breeding season (Grinnell and Miller 1944). In the north, breeds east to Siskiyou Co. (McCaskie et al. 1979). A rare, local breeder in desert riparian areas, and a regular winter visitant to southern interior lowlands. There is a summer population east of the Sierra Nevada north as far as Bishop (Inyo Co.) (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Resident on Channel Islands (Garrett and Dunn 1981), and rare to uncommon on Farallon Islands, fall through spring (DeSante and Ainley 1980). Closely tied to streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, agricultural ditches, sewage ponds, bays, tidepools, almost any body of water.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Mostly feeds on insects hawked from the air over grassy fields or open water during sallies made from a perch. Occasionally eats small fish. Regurgitates pellets (Ehrlich et al. 1988). May glean insects from foliage or ground.

Cover: Trees and shrubs and other riparian vegetation provide cover. Human-made structures also provide cover and perches.

Reproduction: Nest built of mud and plant matter near or over water on cliff face, on wall of old building, under bridge, under eaves, and in many other natural and human-made, sheltered locations near water.

Water: Rarely found far from water, and if so, usually in winter. Drinks and bathes regularly (Airola 1980).

Pattern: Frequents open areas in and near riparian habitats, or other water margin with shade.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Mostly a yearlong resident in California. Absence from breeding areas in Inyo Co., invasion of southeastern deserts in winter, and migrant status on the Farallon Islands suggest some latitudinal movement in fall and spring. Reported to wander upslope and downslope from breeding area in mountain ranges.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Nests from March to August with peak activity in May. Pair nests solitarily. Clutch size 3-7, average 4. May raise 2 broods in a season. Incubation 15-18 days; altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 21 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Subject to infrequent predation by small mammals, snakes, accipiters, and falcons. Sexes may maintain separate feeding territories in winter (Hoffmann 1927).

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