

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

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SAY'S PHOEBE

*Sayornis saya*

Family: TYRANNIDAE  
B323

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to common, summer resident in open, sunny, arid habitats east of Cascade-Sierra crest and throughout the deserts from sea level to at least 2000 m (6500 ft). Occasional to uncommon summer resident in dry parts of San Joaquin Valley and inner Coast Ranges from Contra Costa Co. south. Uncommon in inner Coast Ranges north of Sonoma Co. Preferred nesting habitats include grasslands and early successional stages of sagebrush, bitterbrush, desert scrub, alkali desert scrub, and desert wash. Withdraws from northern and elevated portions of breeding range in fall and winter. Common to abundant migrant and winter resident (September to March) at lower elevations throughout California from Sonoma Co. and head of Sacramento Valley south (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Gaines 1977b, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Hawks flying insects from low, exposed perches, or hovers over ground or water, picking insects from surface.

**Cover:** Inhabits open terrain where occasional shrubs, rocks, clods, fence posts, wires, corners of buildings, provide hunting perches and cover. For nesting, requires support-providing ledges that are sheltered from the sun.

**Reproduction:** Open-cup nest of plant material, hair, spider silk, placed on rocky shelf, undercut bank, erosion hole in wash or cliff, eaves of building, shelf in abandoned building, ledge on bridge or culvert.

**Water:** Frequents dry, open habitats, sometimes near water. Occasionally feeds over small bodies of water.

**Pattern:** Nesters most numerous where suitable nest sites occur within or on edge of sparsely vegetated desert or grassland habitats.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Arrives in northern and elevated portions of breeding range mid-February to March, and departs by October. Beginning in September, migrants, probably from Great Basin, arrive in Central Valley and coastal districts and augment populations in the southern and lower portions of breeding range; these winterers depart by March.

**Home Range:** No information found, but may equal territory.

Territory: Territory in Kansas ranged from 1.3 to 2.8 ha (3.2 to 6.9 ac); average 2.0 ha (4.9 ac) (Fitch 1958). In California deserts, Zembal (1974) found fewer than 1 male per 40 ha (100 ac).

Reproduction: Peak of egg-laying varies with elevation from early April to late May. Monogamous; clutch 4-5eggs (range3-7). Incubation 12-14 days. Often raises 2 broods, occasionally 3 in south; male cares for first while female begins second. Altricial young Fledge at 14-16 days (Bent 1942, Ligon 1961).

Niche: Sexes may maintain separate feeding territories in winter (Hoffmann 1927).

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