

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

WESTERN KINGBIRD

Tyrannus verticalis

Family: TYRANNIDAE

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B333

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common breeder in spring and summer in arid, unforested lowlands throughout California. Breeds locally on the North Coast, but is more abundant in the drier interior. Inhabits open habitats: grasslands, croplands, and open shrublands. Generally found below 1500 m (5000 ft), but postbreeding individuals have been found as high as 3400 m (11,300 ft). Usually departs California by late summer; stragglers occur rarely into October.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds almost entirely on flying insects, but occasionally eats seeds and berries. Sallies after flying insects over open terrain from a conspicuous perch.

Cover: Trees and large shrubs in open lowlands provide cover.

Reproduction: Nest is a cup; usually 1.5 to 12 m (5-40 ft) above ground on a horizontal branch of an oak, cottonwood, or willow. Sometimes nests on fencepost, utility pole, or other human-made structure.

Water: No data found on water needs.

Pattern: Inhabits open grasslands and croplands bordered by trees. Open and sparse stages of shrub and woodland habitats also used. Sometimes found in higher elevation shrub habitats in late summer.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Arrives from wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America in late March, and departs in late summer. Stragglers occur into October. There are only a few substantiated winter records for the state.

Home Range: Hespenheide (1964) reported foraging range to be at least 400 m (1300 ft) from the nest.

Territory: Grinnell et al. (1930) found nesting pairs spaced about every 400 m (1300 ft) at Eagle Lake, Lassen Co.

Reproduction: Breeding season from April into late July with peak in May to early June. Monogamous. Sometimes several pairs build nests close to one another in a small grove of trees. Rarely, 2 nests are in the same tree (Bent 1942). Clutch averages 4 eggs; range 3-7. Incubation 12-14 days; both parents feed altricial nestlings (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Intolerant of raptors or corvids in vicinity of nest, but usually tolerant of other birds nesting nearby. Subject to predation by accipiters, falcons, snakes, domestic cats and other small mammals. Apparently has expanded range into new croplands since 1900 (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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B333

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