

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

---

EASTERN KINGBIRD

*Tyrannus tyrannus*

Family: TYRANNIDAE  
B334

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: M. Green  
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt  
Edited by: R. Duke, D. Winkler

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A casual but regular transient, late spring through fall, along the North Coast and southern interior of the state. Rare at same season in northern interior and southern coastal regions. There are only 2 breeding records in California; at Honey Lake, Lassen Co. in 1971; and near Edgewood, Siskiyou Co. in 1977 (McCaskie et al. 1979, 1988). Casual in other parts of the state in summer. Transients arrive in late May, decrease during summer, increase slightly in fall, and are gone by late October. Occurs in lowlands, most often in large, flat areas with some riparian vegetation. Also occurs in migration in more arid open areas, grasslands, and open shrubland.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds almost exclusively on flying insects caught in sallies from a perch. Occasionally feeds on berries and other fruits, and may hover and pounce on insects (Bent 1942).

**Cover:** During nesting, cover is usually provided by riparian vegetation next to open fields used for foraging. During migration, trees and shrubs in many open habitats supply cover.

**Reproduction:** Usually nests near or over water in willows or other riparian trees or shrubs. Also will nest in open areas on a shrub or post where trees are absent. Average nest height is 7 m (23 ft).

**Water:** Apparently seeks riparian habitats for nesting.

**Pattern:** In migration, occurs in grasslands, open croplands, and open shrublands. For nesting, seeks riparian habitats next to open foraging areas.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** A summer visitor and transient in California.

**Home Range:** No data found.

**Territory:** Appears to be interspecifically territorial towards western kingbird.

**Reproduction:** Monogamous; solitary pair breeds June through August. Clutch size 3-5 eggs. Incubation 12-13 days, by both parents. Nestling period 13-14 days; parents continue to feed altricial young up to 35 days (Harrison 1978). Timing of breeding apparently related to insect abundance (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Niche: Highly intolerant of raptors and corvids. Probably subject to occasional predation from falcons, accipiters, snakes, domestic cats, and other small mammals.

Comments: Little information available on population in California.

#### REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1942. Life histories of North American flycatchers, larks, swallows, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179. 555pp.
- Davis, D. E. 1955. Observations on the breeding biology of kingbirds. *Condor* 57:208-212.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of north American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland, OH. 416pp.
- Harrison, C. J. O., ed. 1978. Bird families of the world. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. 264pp.
- Manolis, T. 1973. The eastern kingbird in California. *West. Birds* 4:33-34.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1988. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. Reprinted with suppl. 108pp.en Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Ohlendorf, H. M. 1974. Competitive relationships among kingbirds (*Tyrannus*) in Trans-Pecos Texas. *Wilson Bull.* 86:357-373.
- Peterson, R. T., and E. L. Chalif. 1973. A field guide to Mexican birds and adjacent Central America. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA 298pp.
- Small, A. 1974. The birds of California. Winchester Press, New York. 310pp.
- Smith, W. J. 1966. Communication and relationships in the Genus *Tyrannus*. *Nuttall Ornithol. Club Publ. No. 6.* 250pp.
- Whedon, A. D. 1938. Nesting behavior of kingbirds. *Wilson Bull.* 50:288-289.

B334

---

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.