

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

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TREE SWALLOW

*Tachycineta bicolor*

Family: HIRUNDINIDAE  
B339

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common summer resident in central and northern California; uncommon south of San Francisco Bay. Common to occasional transient throughout the state in virtually all non-desert habitats. Frequents valley foothill and montane riparian habitats below 2700 m (9000 ft) for breeding. In winter, inhabits lowlands near estuaries, rivers, lakes, and emergent wetlands. In winter, common in southern California at Salton Sea and Colorado River, uncommon to rare in coastal California north to Sonoma Co., and in the Central Valley (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, 1988).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds mostly on insects hawked in long, cruising flights. Small seeds and berries may make up about 20% of the diet (Bent 1942).

**Cover:** In summer, cover is provided by forest and woodland near water. In winter and migration, uses more open habitats; grasslands, meadows, brushlands, also near water.

**Reproduction:** Chiefly nests in old woodpecker hole, but also on cliff or bank, in nest box, or other human-made structure. Nest made mostly of twigs and other plant materials and lined with feathers. Nest usually in a tree or snag close to or surrounded by water.

**Water:** No data found on drinking needs. Frequents areas near water, and nests only near water.

**Pattern:** Riparian and other woodlands up through lodgepole pine belt are favored breeding habitats. In winter, uses open areas near bodies of water. Requires trees and snags with cavities for nesting.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** The first spring transients arrive in California in late January from Mexico and Central America. Numbers increase through spring, but diminish in summer in southern California. In late summer and early fall, numbers increase again as transients pass through from the north. Most migration has been completed by the end of October. Small numbers regularly winter on the coast north to central California, and in the Central Valley.

**Home Range:** Kuerzi (1941) stated home range is "large".

**Territory:** Territory restricted to nest (Kuerzi 1941). In the Sierra Nevada, densities of

nesting pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) included 4-18 in riparian habitat (N = 3) and 2-10 in mixed conifer forest (N = 4), as reported in *American Birds* (1948-1976) (Raphael and White 1978).

**Reproduction:** Breeds mid-April to mid-August with peak activity in May and June. Usually nests solitarily, but sometimes in small groups, depending on nest site availability (Bent 1942). Lays 3-7 eggs, average 5; often double-brooded. Incubation 13-16 days. Altricial young tended by both adults, and fledge at 16-24 days (Harrison 1978).

**Niche:** Probably subject to predation from snakes, small mammals, and hawks. As with other swallows, adults are swift fliers and infrequently fall prey to hawks.

**Comments:** Decrease in numbers in southern and central California in recent years apparently results from destruction of riparian habitats, removal of snags, and competition with European starlings for woodpecker nest holes.

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