

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

AMERICAN CROW

Corvus brachyrhynchos

Family: CORVIDAE
B353

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant, yearlong resident of coastal California, the Central Valley, and foothills of the Sierra Nevada. A summer resident on the Northeastern Plateau, and at higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada. Found rarely up to mixed conifer habitat in mountains in spring and fall (Verner and Boss 1980). Casual and sporadic in interior southern lowlands in winter (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Occurs in valley foothill hardwood and valley foothill hardwood-conifer, valley foothill riparian, annual grassland, perennial grassland, orchard-vineyard, cropland, pasture, and urban habitats. Absent from desert habitats.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Omnivorous. Eats nuts, seeds and grains, fruits, insects, bird eggs and nestlings, carrion, small vertebrates, and garbage (Bent 1946). Gleans and probes on ground. Insects are fed to young. In Kansas, 69% of annual diet was plant foods (Platt 1956). Ejects pellets.

Cover: Large trees and shrubs in woodlands, groves, orchards, provide roosting, nesting, and other cover.

Reproduction: Nest is a large stick platform with an inner cup lined with mud and fine vegetation. Typically placed in crotch of a tree 3 to 7.6 m (10-25 ft) above ground, range 0-30 m (0-100 ft). Nest sometimes placed in shrub, on ground, or on utility pole (Harrison 1978).

Water: Drinks freely (Airola 1980).

Pattern: Sparse and open woodlands, riparian woodlands, orchards, and areas with tall trees in vicinity of pastures, grasslands, and croplands typify habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Mostly resident yearlong. Summer breeders in northeastern corner of the state leave the area in winter. Very gregarious in winter.

Home Range: In California, winter density reported as 2-10 per km² (5-25 per mi²) (Emlen 1940).

Territory: Emlen (1942) found an even spacing of 60 nests over 43.7 ha (108 ac) in a walnut orchard in California, suggesting territoriality within a loose colony. Fitch (1958) found 5 "distinct nesting areas" in an 81 ha (200 ac) woodland inhabited by about 20 adult crows.

Reproduction: Pair nests in loose colony from March into July, with peak activity in May and June. Lays 2-8 eggs per clutch, average 4-5. Incubation lasts about 18 days. Altricial nestlings tended by both parents until fledging at about 35 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Preys on bird eggs and nestlings. Often mobs large raptors and is mobbed by smaller passerines.

REFERENCES

- Airola, D. A., ed. 1980. California wildlife habitat relationships program: Northeast Interior Zone. Vol III. Birds. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Lassen Natl. For., Susanville. 590pp.
- Bent, A. C. 1946. Life histories of North American jays, crows, and titmice. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 191. 495pp.
- Emlen, J. T., Jr. 1940. The midwinter distribution of the crow in California. Condor 42:287-294.
- Emlen, J. T., Jr. 1942. Notes on a nesting colony of western crows. Bird-Banding 13:143-153.
- Fitch, H. S. 1958. Home ranges, territories, and seasonal movements of vertebrates of the Natural History Reservation. Univ. Kans., Lawrence. Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist. 11:63-326.
- 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.
- Platt, D. 1956. Food of the crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos* (Brehm), in south-central Kansas. Univ. Kans. Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist. 8:477-498.
- Verner, J., and A. S. Boss. 1980. California wildlife and their habitats: western Sierra Nevada. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Berkeley. Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-37. 439pp.