

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

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

Poecile atricapillus

Family: PARIDAE
B355

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon resident restricted to Del Norte, Humboldt, and Siskiyou cos. in northern California. Occurs locally in montane riparian habitat from coast into mountainous areas inland; also found locally in the more arid Shasta Valley, Siskiyou Co. Occasionally wanders in winter (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats insects and spiders mostly; also takes fruits and seeds. Searches for food on foliage, twigs, branches, trunks, and sometimes on the ground. Gleans invertebrates, searches for seeds in conifer cones, in alders and other riparian trees, hammers at hard seeds; often caches food in crevices.

Cover: Cover provided by trees and shrubs in montane riparian habitat; also by conifers adjacent to riparian habitat.

Reproduction: Excavates its own cavity in rotten snag, branch, or stump, or nests in old woodpecker hole. Nest usually less than 3 m (10 ft) above ground in a deciduous tree.

Water: Regularly bathes and drinks (Odum 1942).

Pattern: In California, mostly restricted to montane riparian habitat with alder, willow, birch, and other deciduous riparian trees. Occasionally ventures into conifer stands near riparian areas.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Yearlong, resident in California. Flocks may wander a bit in winter.

Home Range: Winter flock home range reported averaging about 14 ha (35 ac) in Minnesota (Hartzler 1970) and in New York (Odum 1942). Winter flock usually composed of 5-7 individuals, sometimes up to 12, or more (Bent 1946). Home range in breeding season probably equal to territory.

Territory: In Massachusetts, territory averaged 4.5 ha (11.1 ac) (Smith 1976). Odum (1941) found territory averaged 5.3 ha (13.2 ac) in New York. In a Utah riparian woodland, Stefanski (1967) found territory averaged 2.2 ha (5.5 ac). In a Montana riparian area, Walcheck (1970) reported breeding density of 13 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac).

Reproduction: Nests April through July; peak activity in May. Pair nests solitarily. Lays 5-13 eggs, usually 6-8. Incubation 12-14 days, by female. Altricial young tended by both parents; leave hole nest at 16 days. Breeds first at 1 yr (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Preyed upon by hawks and small mammals. As a hole nester, subject to little parasitism from cowbirds.

Comments: Uncommon and local in California, largely restricted to riparian habitat.

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