

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

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MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE

*Poecile gambeli*

Family: PARIDAE

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B356

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant resident in northern interior mountain ranges, the Sierra Nevada, and southern mountains; absent from central coastal mountains. In the south, resident in coastal ranges from Santa Barbara to San Diego Co., and from the White to New York Mts. In the north, common in the Sierra Nevada and Cascades, east and west of the Cascades, and southward on inner Coast Ranges to Colusa Co. Frequents coniferous forests, especially ponderosa, Jeffrey, lodgepole, and eastside pine, as well as red fir and mixed conifer habitats. In winter, may move downslope to riparian and hardwood habitats. In the south, regularly moves downslope to foothills, irregularly to coast and desert regions. In the north, downslope movement occasionally extends to the humid outer coastal ranges (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds mostly on insects and spiders; also eats some seeds and other plant material, especially in fall and winter (Airola and Barrett 1985). Gleans food from foliage and twigs of conifers, and to a lesser extent from deciduous trees.

**Cover:** Cover provided by coniferous forests. In some areas may breed in lower elevation hardwood-conifer habitats. May remain in conifer forests at high elevations in winter or move downslope.

**Reproduction:** Nests in old woodpecker hole or natural cavity in coniferous or deciduous tree, or in nest box. Occasionally excavates or enlarges own cavity in rotted wood.

**Water:** No information found on water needs.

**Pattern:** Inhabits forests with moderate to sparse canopy. Also uses margins of dense forests.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Permanent resident in montane coniferous forests, with some downslope movement to lowlands in winter.

**Home Range:** Probably equal to territory size in summer.

**Territory:** Laudenslayer and Balda (1976) reported territory averaged 1.5 ha (3.8 ac), with 4 breeding pairs per 40 ha (100 ac), in an Arizona juniper-pinyon-ponderosa pine ecotone. Bock and Lynch (1970) found breeding density averaged 15.6 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) in

unburned stands, and 5.2 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) in burned stands, in a pine-fir forest in the Sierra Nevada. Dahlston and Copper (1979), in Modoc and Lassen cos., reported a highest density of 38 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) in white-fir forests with supplementary nest boxes, and a mean density of 24.4 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac). Territory may be maintained by adults all year (Dixon and Gilbert 1964, Dahlston and Copper 1979).

**Reproduction:** Breeds from mid-April to mid-August; peak activity in May and June. Pair breeds solitarily. Lays 5-12 eggs; average 6-8. May produce 2 broods per yr (Bent 1946). Incubation period 14 days. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 20 days (Harrison 1978).

**Niche:** Probably subject to predation by accipiters. Eggs sometimes eaten by small mammals and corvids when nests are accessible. May join flocks of mixed species in winter and forage beyond summer home range.

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