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

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BUSHTIT *Psaltriparus minimus*
Family: AEGITHALIDAE Order: PASSERIFORMES Class: AVES
B360

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common resident in a variety of habitats throughout most of the state, especially valley foothill and montane hardwood, valley foothill hardwood-conifer, and riparian. Also common in pinyon-juniper and juniper habitats. Absent from southeastern desert regions except for slopes of desert ranges. Also absent from western slope of Sierra Nevada above 2100 m (7000 ft) and the eastern slope above 2800 m (9200 ft), except as a vagrant. In fall and winter, vagrant in desert riparian habitats. Resident on Santa Cruz Island (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats mostly insects and spiders; also eats berries and rarely seeds and nectar. Gleans foliage, twigs, and branches of trees and shrubs, and sometimes picks from ground. Feeds in flocks except during breeding season.

Cover: In coastal California, typically finds cover in chaparral, oak woodland, coastal scrub, and residential areas. In interior areas, inhabits chaparral, woodlands, and extends into pine forests at lower elevations. In eastern California, inhabits pinyon-juniper and juniper woodlands, and areas with mountain mahogany or other tall shrubs and small trees. Sometimes uses riparian habitats. Roosts in nest.

Reproduction: Builds pendant nest approximately 20 cm (8 in) long of spider webs and delicate plant material. Nest usually built less than 3.5 m (12 ft) above ground in tree or shrub.

Water: A study of water use by birds in a California oak woodland (Williams and Koenig 1980) reported no drinking, although bathes occasionally.

Pattern: Found in open and dense brush habitats in all stages of growth. In woodlands, generally prefers open areas with a dense understory.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Upslope movement occurs on western slope of Sierra Nevada after breeding (Gaines 1977b). Also moves occasionally in fall and winter into desert riparian habitats. Very gregarious except during breeding season.

Home Range: Ervin (1974) mapped flock home ranges averaging 18 ha (45 ac) in Santa Barbara.

Territory: Laudenslayer and Balda (1976) reported average territory of 1.4 ha (3.5 ac) in an Arizona pinyon-juniper-ponderosa pine ecotone. Hertz et al. (1976) reported a mean territory of 0.4 ha (1.0 ac) in an oak woodland in San Mateo Co. Breeding density in number of males per 40 ha (100 ac) have been reported as: 10 males in wax myrtle forest in Los Angeles Co. (McCarty 1975),18 males in broadleaf evergreen forest in Alameda Co. (Cogswell 1973), and 40 males in California bay-buckeye mixed forest in Marin Co. (Stewart 1975).

Reproduction: Breeds from February to early August, with peak activity from April through June. Pair nests solitarily. Usually lays 5-7 eggs. Nests with 12 and more eggs have been found, but these probably result from more than 1 female laying (Bent 1946). May produce 2 broods per yr (Bent 1946). Incubation is 12-13 days. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 14-15 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Preyed upon by hawks, house cats, and other small mammals. May forage in flocks with other species. Group may roost huddled to conserve energy (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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