

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

CACTUS WREN

Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus

Family: TROGLODYTIDAE
B365

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: D. Dobkin

Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt

Edited by: R. Duke

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A locally common resident in the Mojave and Colorado deserts, north from the Mexican boundary to Inyo and Kern cos. Coastal race found in arid parts of westward-draining slopes of southern California; numbers reduced in recent decades. Frequents desert succulent shrub, Joshua tree, and desert wash habitats.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages on ground and in low vegetation for insects, spiders, other small invertebrates, cactus fruits, other fruits, nectar, and seeds (Bent 1948, Anderson and Anderson 1973). Fruits make up 15-20% of annual diet; more than most U.S. wrens (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Foraging behavior often regulated by heat stress (Ricklefs and Hainsworth 1968), necessitating retreat from exposed sites into shade of shrubs and trees.

Cover: Thickets of xeric vegetation provide cover and thermal relief. Nest used as roost site (Anderson and Anderson 1957).

Reproduction: Nest usually built in cholla or other large, branching cactus, in yucca, or in stiff-twigged, thorny shrub or small tree. Nest is an intricate, woven cylinder, usually placed horizontally 1.2 to 1.5 m (4-5 ft) above the ground (Anderson and Anderson 1957).

Water: Drinks in winter (Anderson and Anderson 1963), but it is uncertain whether drinking water is required.

Pattern: Frequents deserts and other arid terrain with thickets, patches, or tracts of larger, branching cacti, stiff-twigged, thorny shrubs, and small trees (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Not migratory.

Home Range: May be same as territory (Anderson and Anderson 1963).

Territory: Average territory was 1.9 ha (4.8 ac), varying from 1.2-2.8 ha (2.9-6.9 ac), in Arizona (Anderson and Anderson 1973). May maintain territory yearlong (Anderson and Anderson 1963).

Reproduction: Breeds from March into June. Clutch size 4-5, range 3-7 (Harrison 1978). Two broods per season is common. Incubation 15-18 days, by female (Anderson and

Anderson 1960). Altricial nestlings fledge at 17-23 days, average 21 (Hensley 1959, Anderson and Anderson 1960). Young may return to roost in nest after fledging. Young become independent at about 1 mo after leaving nest; sometimes help feed young of later brood (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Anderson and Anderson (1963) listed domestic cats, roadrunners, snakes, and shrikes as predators of adults and nestlings. Austin et al. (1972) observed nestling predation by gopher snakes and whipsnakes. Frequent interactions with curve-billed thrashers reported by Anderson and Anderson (1963), including destruction of cactus wren roosting nests by thrashers.

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