

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

CANYON WREN

Catherpes mexicanus

Family: TROGLODYTIDAE
B367

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon resident restricted to cool, shaded canyons with rock outcrops in mountains of the inner Coast Ranges and the Sierra Nevada (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Found primarily in riparian habitats, but vegetation apparently little affects distribution, except to regulate availability of nest materials and foods. Found from sea level to 2250 m (7500 ft) (Linsdale 1938, Grinnell and Miller 1944). Usually found near water. Absent along the coast north of San Francisco Bay, from most of the Central Valley, and from southern desert lowlands. There are sparse populations in southern desert mountains.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Gleans insects, spiders, and other small invertebrates from rock surfaces or ground, often in concealed sites. Hops or creeps while searching for food. Requires cliffs and large tangles of boulders for foraging (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Bent 1948).

Cover: Small cliffs, talus, or rock outcrops provide foraging, nesting, and other cover.

Reproduction: Nests on ledge in rock cavern or crevice, in crevice of a cliff or bank, or on shelf or in cavity of human-made structure (Harrison 1978). Nest usually located near water (Grinnell and Miller 1944) or in a stream-bearing canyon (Smyth and Coulombe 1971). Nest may be maintained and reused (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Water: Prefers areas near water (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Pattern: Frequents cool, shaded canyons with exposed rock outcrops, small cliffs, or talus, usually in the vicinity of water.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Not migratory. May wander locally in winter (McCaskie et al. 1988).

Home Range: Miller and Stebbins (1964) never observed more than 1 pair per canyon. Cody (1974) reported only 27% of available oak woodland habitat occupied in breeding season, and only 34% occupied in winter. Also scarce in chaparral, occupying only 22% of this habitat in winter.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Breeds from mid-March to mid-July, with peak from mid-April to mid-May

(Bent 1948). Clutch size 4-6, mostly 5 or 6. Male helps female build nest incubate eggs, and feed altricial nestlings and fledglings (Verner and Willson 1969).

Niche: Very little life history information available. Occasionally found in human-inhabited areas with boulders or old stonework.

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