

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

---

HOUSE WREN

*Troglodytes aedon*

Family: TROGLODYTIDAE  
B369

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: D. Dobkin  
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt  
Edited by: R. Duke

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common summer resident from the Oregon border to southern California in valley foothill and montane riparian, valley foothill hardwood, and, especially in the southern portion of state, in chaparral habitats. There is some post-breeding, upslope movement in late summer in the Cascades and Sierra Nevada. A rare to locally common winter visitor in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and other parts of the Central Valley, along the coast from Sonoma Co. south to San Diego Co., and at the Salton Sea and Colorado River. Absent from Mojave and Colorado deserts except during migration, and locally in winter. Some populations may be resident south of the Tehachapis (Small 1974). Transient and winter visitor on the larger Channel Islands (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds on insects, spiders, and other small invertebrates by gleaning from bark and foliage of shrubs, trees, brush piles, logs, rocks and stone walls, ground, and other surfaces. Probes foliage and litter. Most foraging is within 1.3 m (4 ft) of ground within deciduous thickets, low trees, or chaparral (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Bent 1948).

**Cover:** Deciduous thickets, especially in riparian habitats, low trees and shrubs, and chaparral provide cover.

**Reproduction:** Nests in virtually any cavity or crevice; commonly in a woodpecker hole in a tree or snag, or in a hole or sheltered corner in a building. Usually nests within 3 m (10 ft) of ground, but may be as high as 15 m (50 ft) (Kendeigh 1941b).

**Water:** Not observed drinking in summer in coastal California (Williams and Koenig 1980).

**Pattern:** Most abundant where a brushy understory occurs beneath oaks and other riparian deciduous trees. Requires cavities in deciduous trees and snags with thickets nearby for foraging. Regular use of conifers for nesting or foraging appears uncommon (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** A summer resident only throughout most of northern California; moves downslope and south for winter. Some post-breeding upslope movement occurs in late summer in Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range.

**Home Range:** No data found.

**Territory:** In Oregon, averaged 0.9 ha (2.3 ac), range 0.5-1.8 ha (1.1-4.4 ac), in 14 breeding territories (Kroodsma 1973). In Ohio, 178 breeding territories averaged 0.4 ha (1.0 ac), range 0.03 to 1.5 ha (0.08 to 3.6 ac) (Kendeigh 1941b).

**Reproduction:** Breeds from early April to late August, with peak from late May to early July. Male may be polygynous (Harrison 1978). Clutch size 3-9, usually 5 or 6. Usually produces 2 broods per season. Incubation 13-15 days, by female only. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave the nest at 12-18 days.

**Niche:** Preyed upon by sharp-shinned hawks, snakes, and small mammals. Reported to occasionally destroy eggs of other house wrens and other bird species (Kendeigh 1941b).

## REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1948. Life histories of North American nuthatches, wrens, thrashers, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 195. 475pp.
- Bock, C. E., and J. F. Lynch. 1970. Breeding bird populations of burned and unburned conifer forests in the Sierra Nevada. *Condor* 72:182-189.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of north American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland, OH. 416pp.
- Johnston, D. W. 1949. Populations and distribution of summer birds of Latah County, Idaho. *Condor* 51:140-149.
- Kendeigh, S. C. 1941b. Territorial and mating behavior of the house wren. *Illinois Biol. Monogr.* 18:1-120.
- Kroodsma, D. E. 1973. Coexistence of Bewick's wrens and house wrens in Oregon. *Auk* 90:341-352.
- Raphael, M. G., and M. White. 1978. Avian utilization of snags in a northern California coniferous forest. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Reg. 5, San Francisco. Prog. Rep. 18pp.
- Raphael, M. G., and M. White. 1984. Use of snags by cavity-nesting birds in the Sierra Nevada. *Wild. Monogr. No. 86.* 66pp.
- Small, A. 1974. The birds of California. Winchester Press, New York. 310pp.
- Walcheck, K. C. 1970. Nesting bird ecology of four plant communities in the Missouri River Breaks, Montana. *Wilson Bull.* 82:370-382.
- Williams, P. L., and W. D. Koenig. 1980. Water dependence of birds in a temperate oak woodland. *Auk* 97:339-350.