

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

AMERICAN DIPPER

Cinclus mexicanus

Family: CINCLIDAE
B373

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: M. Green
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke, D. Winkler

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Uncommon to common resident on clear, fast-flowing streams and rivers in montane regions throughout the state. Common in the Cascade Range and Sierra Nevada, occupying riverine habitats up to 3500 m (11,600 ft) elevation. Locally common on mountain streams in Trinity and Siskiyou cos., in the Coast Ranges, and in the Warner Mts., Modoc Co. Uncommon and local in the San Bernardino, San Gabriel and San Jacinto Mts. of southern California. Absent from desert ranges south of White Mts., Inyo Co., where it nests regularly. May move to lower elevations in winter (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats aquatic insects and larvae, small fish, snails, tadpoles, and occasionally flying insects. Gleans rocks in streams, on shore, and under water; swims after small fish and tadpoles, and sometimes hawks insects. Uses wings and feet to swim under water, and walks on stream bottom. Usually feeds along clear, fast-flowing stream or river with rocky bottom, but sometimes feeds along alpine pond near stream (Bent 1948).

Cover: Often perches on rock or dead branch beside stream. Nests and roosts in cover of sheltered cavity or crevice along streambank.

Reproduction: Builds a domed nest of grasses, mosses, and leaves; usually within 1-2 m (3-6 ft) of stream surface in a location inaccessible to mammals. Nest may be in crevice in rocks, behind waterfall, in stump or log, in bank, or under bridge or other human-made structure.

Water: Requires clear, fast-moving water.

Pattern: Confined to clear, clean streams and rivers with rocky shores and bottoms in mountains.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Yearlong, resident. May be some downslope movement or wandering from high altitudes to lowlands in winter.

Home Range: Probably equal to territory.

Territory: In Montana, Bakus (1959) reported defense of up to 320 m (1050 ft) of stream in breeding season, and from 46-820 m (150-2700 ft) of stream in nonbreeding season.

Additionally, he found year-round density of 1.3 to 2.9 per km (2.1 to 4.6 per mi) of stream. Where weather permits, territory occupied all year.

Reproduction: Breeds from March into August, with peak activity from May into July. Most males monogamous, but polygyny was common in a study in Montana (Price and Bock 1973). Lays 3-6 eggs, usually 4 or 5. Eggs incubated 16 days by female. Altricial young tended by both parents; leave nest at 18-25 days; fed by parents another 12 days (Harrison 1978). May raise 2 broods per season (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Niche: Snakes and small mammals prey on eggs and young (Bent 1948).

REFERENCES

- Bakus, G. J. 1959. Territoriality, movements, and population density of the dipper in Montana. *Condor* 61:410-425.
- Bent, A. C. 1948. Life histories of North American nuthatches, wrens, thrashers, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 195. 475pp.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- 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.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Price, F. E., and C. E. Bock. 1973. Polygyny in the dipper. *Condor* 75:457-459. a No. 27. 608pp.

B373

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.