

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

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SWAINSON'S THRUSH

*Catharus ustulatus*

Family: TURDIDAE  
B385

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Common as a migrant and summer resident with wide variation in abundance within California; absent in winter. Found the length of the state in riparian habitats and in dense shrubs. Widespread in spring as a migrant; common in desert riparian habitat and in dense brush throughout interior and on coast. Sometimes found in late spring in riparian habitats in southern mountains. In summer, common in valley foothill riparian habitat along the coast from Santa Barbara Co. north to the Oregon border. Rare in the south and on western slope of Sierra Nevada in summer; common east of Sierra Nevada crest from Modoc and Lassen cos. through Mono Co. (Grinnell and Miller 1944). In fall, common in the north in Great Basin, interior, and coast (McCaskie et al. 1979). In the south in fall, found mainly along immediate coast including Channel Islands; rarely found in southern interior in fall.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Mostly eats insects and spiders; also berries and other fruits. Searches litter under shrubs and on forest floor, gleans from shrubs; rarely flycatches.

**Cover:** Wooded riparian habitats with a dense understory provide cover in summer. In migration, cover is provided by a variety of woodland and forest habitats with a dense understory, as well as by riparian areas, including desert riparian habitat.

**Reproduction:** Nest is an open cup of fine twigs, stems, lichens, grasses, dried leaves, rootlets, bark, and mud (Harrison 1978). Usually placed in crotch of a willow, alder, or similar cover in riparian habitat. Nest height varies from 0.6 to 6 m (2-20 ft) above ground; nest usually near water.

**Water:** Nests and forages near water in wooded riparian habitats.

**Pattern:** Frequents riparian woodlands, especially with dense understory; often forages in nearby forest or woodland.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity; nocturnal migrant.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Arrives in California in April from wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America (Bent 1949). Numbers peak in May, then decline slightly as many migrants continue to breeding grounds farther north. Numbers increase again in September with fall migration, then decline by the end of September as individuals return to wintering grounds.

**Home Range:** No data found.

**Territory:** No data found. Density per 40 ha (100 ac) reported as: 45-70 pairs in an Idaho Douglas-fir forest (Johnston 1949), 13 pairs in a Montana riparian forest (Walcheck 1970), and 40 males in oak-buckeye-bay mixed forest in Marin Co. (Stewart 1973a).

**Reproduction:** Breeds from mid-April to mid-August with peak activity in May and June. Pair nests solitarily; lays 3-5 eggs, average 4. Incubation 10-13 days, by female. Altricial young tended in nest by both parents for 10-12 days (Harrison 1978). Breeds at 1 yr.

**Niche:** Eggs and adults preyed upon by the same predators as are other woodland passerines: accipiters, snakes, and small mammals.

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