

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

---

HERMIT THRUSH

*Catharus guttatus*

Family: TURDIDAE  
B386

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A widespread and common, summer resident in the Cascade Range, Sierra Nevada, and throughout northwestern California. In summer, inhabits dense conifer habitats of northern coast and montane habitats, mostly ponderosa pine, montane hardwood, montane hardwood-conifer, and lodgepole pine. Apparently breeders in California migrate out of the state in fall and are replaced by other races from the north (Grinnell and Miller 1944). These races winter in lowlands and lower portions of mountain ranges throughout the state. Most common wintering in northern, central, and coastal portions of the state; locally uncommon in the southern interior. Winters in conifer, hardwood, and hardwood-conifer habitats with dense understories, and in other dense, shrubby areas. Common in urban and orchard-vineyard habitats in winter, especially near sources of berries and other fruits (McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Fairly common to abundant migrant on Farallon Islands (DeSante and Ainley 1980); also occurs on Channel Islands in migration (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats insects, spiders, worms, other small invertebrates. Also eats large amounts of berries, other fruits and seeds (especially poison-oak) (Beal 1907, Bent 1949). Usually forages on ground, under brush canopy (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Miller and Stebbins 1964), in bushes, and rarely in the air. Sifts forest litter with bill. Gleans and plucks berries from bushes while hovering or fluttering. Rarely flycatches.

**Cover:** Cover provided by stands of trees with mostly closed canopy and dense shrub understory.

**Reproduction:** Nest is an open cup 0.9 to 9 m (3-30 ft) above ground; usually placed in a well-shaded, small tree. Occasionally nests on ground. Often nests near water.

**Water:** Drinks freely (Airola 1980).

**Pattern:** In summer, usually found in cool, moist, forests with dense understory; especially on north-facing slopes and in shaded canyons.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Breeders in California apparently migrate out of the state and are replaced in winter by individuals that breed north of the state. Winter visitants usually arrive by October and depart by May.

**Home Range:** Breeding density in Arizona was 1.1 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) in

fir-pine-aspen, 8 pairs per 40 ha in ponderosa pine (Haldeman et al. 1973), and 10-13 pairs per 40 ha in spruce-fir forest (Carothers et al. 1973). In a bay-Bishop pine-mixed forest in Marin Co., Stewart (1974) found 10 males per 40 ha.

Territory: Carothers et al. (1973) sketched 3 territories varying from 0.6 to 1.0 ha (1.5 to 2.5 ac) in a spruce-fir forest in Arizona.

Reproduction: Breeds from early May to mid-August. Lays 3-6 eggs, usually 4; incubated by female for 12-13 days. Altricial young tended by both parents until fledging at 10 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Subject to predation by accipiters, snakes, domestic cats, and corvids.

## REFERENCES

- Airola, D. A., ed. 1980. California wildlife habitat relationships program: Northeast Interior Zone. Vol III. Birds. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Lassen Natl. For., Susanville. 590pp.
- Beal, F. E. L. 1907. Birds of California in relation to the fruit industry, Part 1. U.S. Dep. Agric., Biol. Survey Bull. No 30. 100pp.
- Bent, A. C. 1949. Life histories of North American thrushes, kinglets, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 196. 454pp.
- Carothers, S. W., R. P. Balda, and J. R. Haldeman. 1973. Habitat selection and density of breeding birds of a coniferous forest in the White Mountains, Arizona. Pages 22-36 in S. W. Carothers, J. R. Haldeman, and R. P. Balda, eds. Breeding birds of the San Francisco Mountain area and the White Mountains, Arizona. Mus. North. Ariz. Tech. Ser. 12. 54pp.
- DeSante, D. F., and D. G. Ainley. 1980. The avifauna of the South Farallon Islands, California. Studies in Avian Biol. No. 4. Cooper Ornithol. Soc., Lawrence, KA. 104pp.
- 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.
- Haldeman, J. R., R. P. Balda, and S. W. Carothers. 1973. Breeding birds of a ponderosa pine forest and a fir, pine, aspen forest in the San Francisco Mountain area, Arizona. Pages 1-21 in S. W. Carothers, J. R. Haldeman, and R. P. Balda, eds. Breeding birds of the San Francisco Mountain and the White Mountains, Arizona. Mus. North. Ariz. Tech. Ser. 12. 54pp.
- 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.
- Miller, A. H., and R. C. Stebbins. 1964. The lives of desert animals in Joshua Tree National Monument. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 452pp.
- Stewart, R. M. 1974. California bay-Bishop pine-mixed forest. Page 1037-1038 in W. T. Van Velzen, ed. Thirty-eighth breeding bird census. Am. Birds 28:987-1054.