

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

AMERICAN PIPIT

Anthus rubescens

Family: MOTACILLIDAE
B404

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common winter resident of lowlands throughout most of California; a fairly common transient in mountains in spring and fall; and a rare summer resident, breeding sparsely apparently only in the high Sierra Nevada. Occurs in open, preferably moist, habitats with bare ground or low, sparse vegetation; e.g., annual and perennial grassland, wet meadow, cropland, pasture. Also occurs on barrens, beaches, and shores of aquatic habitats. Nests only above timberline. First nesting records from 1975 and later in alpine dwarf-shrub habitat in Mono and Fresno cos., although nesting had been suspected elsewhere in high Sierra Nevada and on Mt. San Geronio, San Bernardino Co. (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, 1988, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Diet almost entirely insects in breeding season (Verbeek 1970), but includes mollusks, crustaceans, other arthropods, and seeds in fall and winter (Bent 1950, Martin et al. 1961). Forages in open, often moist habitats where vegetation is low or absent, gleaning food from ground and low plants. Also takes windblown insects from snowfields, sometimes hawks insects in air, and occasionally wades into shallow water to forage.

Cover: Uses rock, tussock, piece of wood, clump of earth for nesting and other cover.

Reproduction: Builds nest in tundra, alpine, alpine dwarf-shrub, or similar habitat. Nest site must be snow-free early in season; usually sheltered by overhanging rock, tussock of herbage, or other low vegetation. Avoids wet areas, and site usually faces downwind (Verbeek 1970).

Water: No additional information found.

Pattern: Frequents alpine dwarf-shrub and similar habitats in summer; winters in grassland, meadow, pasture, and similar habitats with low, sparse vegetation.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Population wintering in California mostly migrates to breeding grounds from Oregon north to Alaska. Wintering grounds of the small population breeding in California unknown.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: In Wyoming alpine habitat, territory varied from 0.16 to 0.34 ha (0.39 to 0.83 ac),

average 0.18 ha (0.45 ac) (Verbeek 1970). Drury (1961) estimated that territory in arctic tundra in Canada averaged about 0.57 ha (1.4 ac).

Reproduction: In California, apparently breeds June through early September. A monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch size 3-6 (averaged 4.7 in Wyoming); raises 1 brood per yr. Altricial young tended by both parents. Leave the nest at 14-16 days, become independent at about 14 days, and probably breed first at 1 yr (Verbeek 1970, Harrison 1978).

Niche: Young gather in flocks in late summer. Often forms large flocks in winter.

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