

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

---

CEDAR WAXWING

*Bombycilla cedrorum*

Family: BOMBYCILLIDAE  
B407

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: S. Granholm  
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt  
Edited by: R. Duke

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common winter resident throughout much of California, excluding southern deserts and higher mountains. Breeds regularly only on coastal slope of Del Norte and Humboldt cos., in small numbers. Nests in valley foothill riparian habitat, often in a humid willow, alder, or bay stand. Also breeds in second-growth or logged Douglas-fir or redwood habitat. Frequents urban and orchard-vineyard habitats (Yocom and Harris 1975). In winter, prefers open forests and shrublands, but occurs almost anywhere with a supply of berries and other small fruits, flower parts, or buds. Widespread in California from September to May, but local occurrence is irregular and numbers vary considerably within and between years. Usually uncommon above foothills, absent in higher mountains, and rare on southern deserts; irregularly common in southern mountains and Colorado River Valley. Found in virtually all habitats except at higher elevations. A few nested in mountains in Plumas Co. in 1973, and in Siskiyou Co. in 1977 (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Annual diet often 70-90% berries and other fleshy fruits, but insects may compose 20-25% of diet in spring and summer (Martin et al. 1961). Nestlings fed insects first few days, then berries and other fruits (Terres 1980). Also eats buds, flower parts, tree sap. Important winter foods in California include toyon, mistletoe, cotoneaster, pyracantha, pepper, and camphor berries, various cultivated fruits, eucalyptus flowers, and cottonwood buds. Gleans from foliage of trees and shrubs, picks fruit, and hawks insects in air.

**Cover:** Trees and large shrubs provide nesting, roosting, and nesting cover. In winter, flock commonly rests in daytime in upper branches of a tree, especially one with little or no foliage.

**Reproduction:** Builds nest in fork or on horizontal branch, often near outer tip; usually in a tree, sometimes in a shrub. Nest height 1.5 to 15 m (5-50 ft) above ground. Requires ripe berries or other fruits to feed young (Lea 1942).

**Water:** Bathes (Staebler and Case 1940), and requires water or snow for drinking (Allen 1930).

**Pattern:** Typically nests in valley foothill riparian habitat in California. In nonbreeding season, nomadic flocks use a variety of habitats seeking berries and other small fruits.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Frequently nomadic in nonbreeding season, following

berry and other fruit crops. Wintering population mostly migrates to breeding grounds north of California, departing in May and returning in September or October. Wintering area of the small breeding population in northwestern California unknown.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: Apparently does not defend a feeding territory; defends only a small area around nest. In an Ohio orchard-residential area, 3 territories averaged 0.04 ha (0.11 ac), range 0.02 to 0.09 ha (0.06 to 0.22 ac); nests were as little as 7.5 m (25 ft) apart (Putnam 1949). Rothstein (1971) reported a loose nesting colony in a pine plantation in Michigan with up to 13 pairs in 0.9 ha (2.3 ac), and nests as little as 7 m (23 ft) apart. Lea (1942) and Crouch (1936) reported weak or no territorial behavior among nesting individuals.

Reproduction: Breeding season usually begins in early June but is variable, perhaps depending on food supply. A monogamous, loosely colonial or solitary nester. Usually lays 3-5 eggs, sometimes 2 or 6 (Leck and Cantor 1979). May be double-brooded (Terres 1980). Incubation 12-14 days. Altricial young tended by both parents; leave nest at 16-18 days (Harrison 1978). Probably breed first at 1 yr.

Niche: May feed in flocks with American robin and other species. Rejects cowbird eggs (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

#### REFERENCES

- Allen, A. A. 1930. Cherry bird - the cedar waxwing. *Bird Lore* 32:298-307.
- Bent, A. C. 1950. Life histories of North American wagtails, shrikes, vireos, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 197. 411pp.
- Crouch, J. E. 1936. Nesting habits of the cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). *Auk* 53:1-8.
- 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
- Lea, R. B. 1942. A study of the nesting habits of the cedar waxwing. *Wilson Bull.* 54:225-237.
- Leck, C. F., and F. L. Cantor. 1979. Seasonality, clutch size, and hatching success in the cedar waxwing. *Auk* 96:196-198.
- Martin, A. C., H. S. Zim, and A. L. Nelson. 1961. *American wildlife and plants, a guide to wildlife food habits*. Dover Publ., Inc., New York. 500pp.
- 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.
- Putnam, L. L. 1949. The life history of the cedar waxwing. *Wilson Bull.* 61:141-182.
- Rothstein, S. I. 1971. High net density and non-random placement in the cedar waxwing. *Condor* 73:483-485.
- Staebler, A. E., and L. D. Case. 1940. Community bathing of the cedar waxwing. *Wilson Bull.* 52:281.
- Terres, J. K. 1980. *The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds*. A. Knopf, New York. 1100pp.
- Yocom, C. F., and S. W. Harris. 1975. *Birds of northwestern California*. Humboldt State Univ. Bookstore, Arcata. 74pp.

of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.