

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

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YELLOW WARBLER

*Dendroica petechia*

Family: PARULIDAE

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B430

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Breeding distribution includes from the coast range in Del Norte county, east to Modoc plateau, south along coast range to Santa Barbara and Ventura counties and along western slope of Sierra Nevada south to Kern county. Also breeds along eastern side of California from the Lake Tahoe area south through Inyo co. Also breeds in several southern California mountain ranges and throughout most of San Diego county. Winters in Imperial and Colorado river valleys. Breeds in riparian woodlands from coastal and desert lowlands up to 2500 m (8000 ft) in Sierra Nevada. Also breeds in montane chaparral, and in open ponderosa pine and mixed conifer habitats with substantial amounts of brush. Numbers of breeding pairs have declined dramatically in recent decades in many lowland areas (southern coast, Colorado River, San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys). Now rare to uncommon in many lowland areas where formerly common (McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). A common migrant on Channel and Farallon Islands in spring and fall (DeSante and Ainley 1980, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Mostly eats insects and spiders. Gleans and hovers in upper canopy of deciduous trees and shrubs. Occasionally hawks insects from air, or eats berries (Bent 1953, Ehrlich et al. 1988).

**Cover:** Usually found in riparian deciduous habitats in summer: cottonwoods, willows, alders, and other small trees and shrubs typical of low, open-canopy riparian woodland. Also breeds in montane shrubbery in open conifer forests; perhaps a recent phenomenon (Gaines 1977b). In migration, visits woodland, forest, and shrub habitats.

**Reproduction:** Nest is an open cup placed 0.6 to 5 m (2-16 ft) above ground in a deciduous sapling or shrub. Territory often includes tall trees for singing and foraging and a heavy brush understory for nesting (Ficken and Ficken 1966).

**Water:** Recorded drinking regularly at a desert waterhole (Smyth and Coulombe 1971).

**Pattern:** Frequents open to medium-density woodlands and forests with a heavy brush understory in breeding season. In migration, found in a variety of sparse to dense woodland and forest habitats.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Usually arrives in California in April, and mostly gone by

October. Apparently there is a postbreeding, upslope movement mostly to middle elevations (Beedy 1975); scarce at elevations above 2500 m (8000 ft) (Gaines 1977b). Small numbers regularly overwinter in southern California lowlands (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Home Range: Home range recorded as less than 0.2 ha (0.5 ac) in New York (Ficken and Ficken 1966), and 0.16 ha (0.4 ac) in Iowa (Kendeigh 1941a). Kendeigh observed individuals regularly moving up to 488 m (1600 ft) to a willow-marsh edge to feed.

Territory: Territory varied from 0.03 ha (0.08 ac) on small islands in Minnesota (Beer et al. 1956), to 0.36 ha (0.9 ac) in a swamp thicket in Illinois.

Reproduction: Breeds from mid-April into early August with peak activity in June. Pair breeds solitarily. Lays 3-6 eggs (usually 4 or 5); incubated by female for 11 days. Altricial young tended by both parents until fledging at 9-12 days (Harrison 1978). Young breed the following year.

Niche: Subject to predation by small mammals, accipiters, corvids, and snakes. Brood parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds is heavy and apparently has been a major cause of the drastic decline in numbers in lowland localities in recent decades (Bent 1953, Garrett and Dunn 1981, Remsen 1978). Parasitism occurred in 9 of 25 nests or family groups in the Sierra Nevada where cowbirds were common (Rothstein et al. 1980, Verner and Ritter 1983, Airola 1986).

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