

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

BLUE GROSBEAK

Passerina caerulea

Family: CARDINALIDAE
B476

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon to locally fairly common, summer resident and breeder in Central Valley and lowlands of southern California, occurring in low, dense valley foothill riparian habitat. Often forages in openings and in adjacent croplands and herbaceous habitats. Not limited to riparian habitats postbreeding or in migration. Southern California locations of summer residence include Owens, Imperial, Coachella, and Colorado River valleys, larger desert watercourses and oases, Kern River above Lake Isabella, and coastal lowlands from San Luis Obispo Co. south. Vagrants occur as far north as Shasta and Del Norte cos. Breeding populations in California have declined in recent decades because of habitat degradation and destruction and cowbird parasitism (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Gaines 1974a, McCaskie et al. 1979, 1988, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds largely on insects; also eats snails, other invertebrates, seeds, grains, and fruits. Feeds mostly on ground under low, dense vegetation or in nearby openings and fields; also forages in low shrubs and trees.

Cover: Dense, riparian habitats, such as thickets of willow, young cottonwood, nettle, knotweed, arrowweed, or tamarisk, provide cover in breeding season. In migration, finds cover in a variety of other habitats as well.

Reproduction: Builds nest in willow or other low dense vegetation near water. Nest is a cup of stems, thin twigs, bark strips, lined with fine rootlets, hairs, and grasses. Nest usually 0.15 to 6 m (0.5 to 20 ft), but mostly 0.6 to 3 m (2-10 ft) above ground.

Water: Probably requires drinking water.

Pattern: Breeds in low, dense riparian habitats and forages in adjacent openings, grasslands, and croplands.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Mostly arrives in California in April and departs in August and September for wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: A breeding territory in South Carolina occupied 6.2 ha (15.3 ac) (Odum and Kuenzler 1955).

Reproduction: Breeding season April to late July, with a peak from early June into early July. Clutch size 2-5 eggs, usually 4. May raise 2 broods yearly in some areas. Incubation 11-12 days, by female alone. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 9-13 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Apparently a common cowbird host. May form postbreeding or migratory flocks (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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B476

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