

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

LAZULI BUNTING

Passerina amoena

Family: CARDINALIDAE
B477

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common summer visitor from April into September throughout most of California, except in higher mountains and southern deserts. Breeds in open chaparral habitats and brushy understories of open wooded habitats, especially valley foothill riparian. Also frequents thickets of willows, tangles of vines, patches of tall forbs. Often breeds on hillsides near streams or springs. In arid areas, mostly breeds in riparian habitats. May breed in tall forbs in mountain meadows (Gaines 1977b). An uncommon breeder in Central Valley, and rare and local above lower montane habitats. Small numbers move upslope after nesting, occasionally as high as 3050 m (10,000 ft). More widespread in lowlands in migration, occurring commonly in Central Valley (especially in fall) and desert oases (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, 1988, Verner and Boss 1980, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds mostly on insects and small seeds. Both are important foods through spring and summer (Martin et al. 1961, Bent 1968). Mostly forages in or beneath tall, dense herbaceous vegetation, shrubs, low tree foliage, and vine tangles. Takes insects and seeds from plants or from ground. Sometimes hawks insects in air and gleans foliage well up into tree canopy.

Cover: Trees and shrubs and herbage provide cover. Male often sings from high perch in a tree, if present; otherwise uses a taller shrub (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Reproduction: Builds nest in dense thicket of shrubs, vines, low trees, or tall forbs; usually 0.5 to 1.3 m (1.5 to 4 ft) above ground (Bent 1968). Often nests near water, but not over water or damp ground (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Water: Drinks water regularly (Smyth and Coulombe 1971).

Pattern: Occupies open brushlands and thickets of willows, other shrubs or trees, vines, or tall weeds, with or without an open overstory of trees. Usually occurs on hillsides near streams or springs; in arid areas mostly restricted to riparian habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: California breeding population migrates to wintering grounds in southern Arizona and Mexico, mostly departing in August and September and returning in April and May. May move upslope postbreeding, sometimes in small flocks.

Home Range: No information found. Reported breeding density per 40 ha (100 ha)

includes: 4 males in Grant Co., Oregon (Archie and Hudson 1973), 16 males in a California riparian habitat (Gaines 1974a), 50 individuals in a Wyoming scrub meadow (Salt 1957), and 24 pairs in Washington (Wing 1949).

Territory: Male defends a nesting territory also used for feeding (Bent 1968).

Reproduction: In California, nesting season usually April into August (Bent 1968). A monogamous, solitary nester; clutch size 3-5, usually 4. Sometimes double-brooded (Bent 1968). Incubation 12 days, apparently by female. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 10-15 days. Probably breeds first at 1 yr (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Indigo bunting invading lazuli bunting range in western U.S.; may be more aggressive (Wells 1958). Whitmore (1975) observed aggressive behavior and apparent competition between these 2 species in Utah in breeding season. In Nebraska, where these 2 buntings are sympatric, they were observed defending non-overlapping, interspecific territories, apparently minimizing competition (Emlen et al. 1975). Root (1969a) observed blue-gray gnatcatcher driving lazuli bunting away from gnatcatcher nest sites, and suggested nest-site competition. Apparently an uncommon host to brown-headed cowbird nest parasitism (Friedmann 1963).

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