

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

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RUFOUS-CROWNED SPARROW

*Aimophila ruficeps*

Family: EMBERIZIDAE

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B487

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common resident of sparse, mixed chaparral and coastal scrub habitats (especially coastal sage) from Mendocino and Tehama cos. south to the Mexican border. Uncommon on lower slopes of western Sierra Nevada, and on Santa Cruz Island (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Most numerous in western portion of range in California. Frequents relatively steep, often rocky hillsides with grass and forb patches; also grassy slopes without shrubs, if rock outcrops are present.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Forages on ground in herbage and in litter beneath shrubs, gleaning from ground and foliage; also gleans foliage of live oak (Verner and Boss 1980). Eats seeds, insects, spiders, grass and forb shoots. Eats mostly insects and spiders in breeding season (Bent 1968).

**Cover:** Secretive; seeks cover in shrubs, rocks, and grass and forb patches. Frequently found in open shrubland in valley foothill hardwood-conifer savannah and open chaparral (Verner and Boss 1980).

**Reproduction:** Nest concealed on ground at base of grass tussock or shrub, occasionally in a shrub.

**Water:** Frequents dry habitats. No additional information found.

**Pattern:** Breeds and feeds on steep, dry, herbage-covered hillsides with scattered shrubs and rock outcrops.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Not migratory. May be some movement upslope postbreeding to 1220 m (4000 ft) in western Sierra Nevada (Gaines 1977b).

**Home Range:** Home range, estimated from nesting density, was about 1.5 ha (3.7 ac) in southern California chaparral (Cody 1974). In Arizona oak woodland, Balda (1969, 1970) reported 6 pairs and 11 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac).

**Territory:** In southern California coastal sage scrub, territory averaged about 0.8 ha (2.0 ac), range 0.5 to 1.3 ha (1.2 to 3.2 ac) (Bent 1968).

**Reproduction:** Breeds from mid-March to mid-June with a peak in May. Monogamous;

breeding territories may occur in groups (Pemberton 1910). Clutch size 2-5 eggs, usually 3 or 4. Incubation by female only, but altricial young tended by both parents (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Eggs and nestlings preyed upon by snakes and small mammals (Bent 1968). Friedmann (1971) reported the first record of cowbird parasitism in this species. May occur in family groups postbreeding (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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