

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

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BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW

*Spizella atrogularis*

Family: EMBERIZIDAE  
B493

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A summer resident. Breeds locally and uncommonly in foothills bordering Central Valley, and commonly on arid mountain slopes of southern California. Occurs mostly on sloping ground in mixed chaparral, chamise-redshank chaparral, sagebrush, and similar brushy habitats, including those in understory of sparse pinyon-juniper, juniper, and other conifer habitats. Frequents shrub stands of mixed species. May favor moderately dense chaparral (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Bent 1968), or open chaparral (Garrett and Dunn 1981) in southern California. Breeds regularly north to Mariposa and Lake cos., and irregularly north to Shasta and Trinity cos. In southern California, breeds on desert ranges north to White Mts., Inyo Co., on arid slopes west of deserts, but only very locally near coast (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Apparently feeds on seeds, insects, and fruits associated with shrubs. Gleans on ground beneath shrubs and in shrubs (Bent 1968).

**Cover:** Tall sagebrush, chaparral, or other shrubs of similar structure provide cover in breeding season and in migration. Usually frequents a variety of shrub species.

**Reproduction:** Nest is a loosely constructed cup of dry grass and forb stems, lined with finer grasses, plant fibers, hairs, feathers (Harrison 1978). Nest usually concealed in dense foliage of a shrub, 0.3 to 0.9 m (1-3 ft) above ground.

**Water:** Has been observed drinking water in late summer (Hardy 1949).

**Pattern:** Breeds and forages in open to moderately dense chaparral and similar brushy habitats; often on arid, south-facing slopes with ceanothus, manzanita, sagebrush, chamise.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Usually arrives in California in April and departs in August or September.

**Home Range:** No data found.

**Territory:** No data found.

**Reproduction:** Breeding season April into early August, with a peak in May and June. Reported to breed in loose colonies (Terres 1980). Clutch usually 3 or 4 eggs, range 2-5.

Incubation perhaps 12-13 days. Altricial young tended by both parents (Harrison 1978, Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Niche: Apparently an uncommon cowbird host (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Little life history information available.

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