

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

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LARK SPARROW

*Chondestes grammacus*

Family: EMBERIZIDAE  
B495

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to fairly common resident in lowlands and foothills throughout much of California. In northeast and Owens Valley, departs for winter. Breeds only locally in southern deserts, but is somewhat more widespread in winter. Frequents sparse valley foothill hardwood, valley foothill hardwood-conifer, open mixed chaparral and similar brushy habitats, and grasslands with scattered trees or shrubs. In woodlands, prefers younger stages and hardwoods (mostly oaks) rather than conifers. Most common around margins of Central Valley, in bordering foothills, and inner coastal ranges; local on coastal slope, especially north of southern Humboldt Co. In lower montane habitats, breeds only very locally in north, but more commonly in south. Breeds locally in higher valleys of southern deserts. Winters fairly commonly in Colorado River Valley, and uncommonly in Imperial Valley and western edge of deserts (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats seeds, grains, and insects, especially grasshoppers. Eats approximately equal quantities of plant and animal foods in nesting season, but in fall and winter plant foods predominate (Martin et al. 1961). Feeds both insects and seeds to nestlings (Bent 1968). Takes insects and seeds from litter on ground, from herbaceous plants, and occasionally from shrubs and trees.

**Cover:** Scattered trees or shrubs are required for lookout and song perches and other cover (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Fence posts, large rocks, other elevated sites, and ground herbage also provide cover.

**Reproduction:** Nest usually built on ground in herbage shaded by a tussock or small shrub. Occasionally nests in a shrub or tree; usually less than 2 m (6 ft) above ground, but up to 6 m (20 ft). Nests have been found in crevices of cliffs (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Bent 1968).

**Water:** Drinks and bathes frequently (Bent 1968); probably requires water.

**Pattern:** Frequents herbaceous ground cover with scattered shrubs or trees for lookout and song perches.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Not migratory over most of California range, or at least present year-round. Breeding populations of northeast and Owens Valley absent from November to March, perhaps migrating to southern deserts, where the species is more

common and widespread in winter. Also leaves montane habitats for winter, perhaps moving downslope.

**Home Range:** Summer home range of a pair in Kansas was 6.1 ha (15 ac) (Fitch 1958).

**Territory:** According to Bent (1968), territorial defense is poorly developed and occurs only in courtship, nest-building, and egg-laying. Territory in Oklahoma included only immediate vicinity of nest. Fitch (1958) reported 2 territories in Kansas of 1.4 and 3.6 ha (3.4 and 8.8 ac).

**Reproduction:** Breeding season begins in April. A monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch usually 4 or 5 eggs, occasionally 3 or 6. Probably a single brood per yr. Incubation 11-12 days, by female. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 9-10 days. Probably breeds first at 1 yr (Harrison 1978).

**Niche:** An occasional host to brown-headed cowbird; 30 records reported by Friedmann (1963). Gregarious; may feed in a flock even in breeding season (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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