

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

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW

Ammodramus savannarum

Family: EMBERIZIDAE
B501

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: D. Dobkin, S. Granholm
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke
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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon and local, summer resident and breeder in foothills and lowlands west of the Cascade-Sierra Nevada crest from Mendocino and Trinity cos. south to San Diego Co. Occurs in dry, dense grasslands, especially those with a variety of grasses and tall forbs and scattered shrubs for singing perches. In southern California occurs mainly on hillsides and mesas in coastal districts, but has bred up to 1500 m (5000 ft) in San Jacinto Mts. Also has been found in Shasta Valley, Siskiyou Co. Secretive in winter; may occur more regularly than indicated by infrequent records, chiefly in coastal southern California (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds primarily on insects, especially Orthoptera; also eats other invertebrates and grass and forb seeds. Searches for food on ground and low foliage within relatively dense grasslands; sometimes scratches in litter (Bent 1968).

Cover: Apparently thick cover of grasses and forbs is essential for concealment.

Reproduction: Builds nest of grasses and forbs in a slight depression in ground, hidden at base of an overhanging clump of grasses or forbs.

Water: No data found. Meets water requirement in part from insects in diet.

Pattern: Frequents dense, dry or well-drained grassland, especially native grassland with a mix of grasses and forbs for foraging and nesting. Uses scattered shrubs for singing perches.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Data scarce because very secretive in winter. Apparently winters rarely but regularly in California, chiefly along southern coast. Summer residents arrive March to May, and most migrate south in August or September. Fall migrants recorded in late September and early October on Farallon Islands (DeSante and Ainley 1980).

Home Range: No data found. In Pennsylvania, Smith (1963) found 4-30 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) over 4 yr. Wing (1949) recorded 4 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) in Washington. Johnston and Odum (1956) reported 10-35 pairs per 40 ha (100 ac) in Georgia.

Territory: In Wisconsin, Wiens (1969) reported 73 territories averaging 0.8 ha (2.1 ac) and

varying from 0.3 to 1.7 ha (0.8 to 4.3 ac). Kendeigh (1941a) reported 6 territories averaging 1.4 ha (3.4 ac) in Iowa. In Pennsylvania, Smith (1963) reported 22 territories averaging 0.8 ha (2.03 ac) and varying from 0.5-1.3 ha (1.2 to 3.3 ac).

Reproduction: Breeds from early April to mid-July, with a peak in May and June. Pair apparently nests solitarily. Clutch size usually 4 or 5 eggs, sometimes 3 or 6. May raise 2 or 3 broods per yr. Incubation 11-12 days, by female alone. Altricial young tended by female; male reacts to predators near nest. Young leave nest at about 9 days, although still unable to fly (Harrison 1978).

Niche: May form semicolonial breeding groups of 3-12 pairs, but apparently does not form flocks in winter. Abundance fluctuates markedly locally and from year to year (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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