

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

LINCOLN'S SPARROW

Melospiza lincolnii

Family: EMBERIZIDAE
B506

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: S. Granholm
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common breeding resident of higher mountains from April into September throughout most of California. From October into April, also fairly common in lowlands and foothills, except in eastern deserts and areas east of Cascade Range and Sierra Nevada. Prefers riparian and wet meadow habitats. In winter, occupies thickets of brush or tall forbs, interspersed with grassy areas, usually on damp ground or near water. Breeds in wet meadows with tall grasses and forbs and thickets of small willows or other riparian shrubs. Lingers in mountains rarely through November. Does not occur in eastern desert ranges, and breeds only very locally in other southern California mountains. Winters fairly commonly along western margins of southern deserts and in Imperial and Colorado River valleys, but very local elsewhere (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al., 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats seeds, insects, millipedes, and other small invertebrates. Animal foods predominate in breeding season; seeds are the main foods at other times (Martin et al. 1961). Gleans invertebrates and seeds from ground and low plants, usually under low, dense cover such as willow thickets and tall meadow herbage. Often scratches for food in soil and leaf litter, and occasionally hawks insects in air.

Cover: Thickets of willows, other shrubs, tall herbs, provide nesting, roosting, resting, escape cover, lookouts, and singing perches.

Reproduction: Usually builds nest on ground concealed in clumps of tall grasses or forbs or at base of willow. Uses other riparian shrubs for nesting cover in more northern regions (Bent 1968) and probably in California also.

Water: Usually occurs in vicinity of water or damp, boggy ground; probably requires drinking water.

Pattern: For nesting, requires wet meadows with willow thickets. In winter, requires thickets of shrubs or tall forbs interspersed with grassy areas, usually on damp ground or near water.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Part of California breeding population winters in southern California lowlands, San Joaquin Valley, and foothills, but most individuals winter south of California and are absent from October to March. Most of California winter population breeds

in northern U.S., Canada, and Alaska, returning to California in September and departing in April (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Home Range: In Kansas, spring migrants settle for days or weeks in small areas; an individual remained in a 0.02 ha (0.06 ac) area for 10 days (Fitch 1958). Density per 40 ha (100 ac) was 20-25 males in Ontario brushlands (Bent 1968), and 50-65 individuals in a Wyoming swamp/scrub meadow (Salt 1957).

Territory: In riparian woodlands of Ohio, average territory was 0.4 ha (1.0 ac) (Nice 1937). In Ontario brushlands, several territories apparently averaged about 0.4 ha (1 ac) (Bent 1968).

Reproduction: Breeding often begins in late May. A monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch size 3-6, usually 4 or 5; may be double-brood. Incubation lasts 13-14 days. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 10-12 days. Probably breeds first at 1 yr (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Dominated by, and may compete with, song sparrow where breeding territories overlap (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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