

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

BRONZED COWBIRD

Molothrus aeneus

Family: ICTERIDAE
B527

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon summer visitor along Colorado River, arriving in April and departing by late July or early August (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Found primarily in open urban and cropland habitats, including farmyards. In other parts of range, commonly feeds beside grazing livestock, and occurs generally in open habitats such as croplands and pastures (Bent 1958). First recorded in California in 1951, and has expanded its range only slightly since then (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds on seeds, grains, insects, other invertebrates; relative quantities eaten unknown. Forages primarily on ground, sometimes by turning over stones and other objects. Often feeds near grazing livestock, snatching insects that are flushed and taking advantage of the shade cast by these large animals; also picks invertebrates off livestock (Bent 1958). In Arizona, commonly forages in residential areas, golf courses, and parks (Robbins and Easterla 1981).

Cover: Apparently roosts in trees, tall shrubs, and thickets of various kinds. Flocks have been found resting in trees and roosting in dense stands of giant cane (Bent 1958).

Reproduction: This brood parasite builds no nest; lays eggs in nests of other birds, to be raised by host parents. Parasitizes fewer species than brown-headed cowbird, most often victimizing orioles (Friedmann 1929). In California, most common hosts are hooded and northern orioles (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Prefers open habitats for foraging; trees, tall shrubs, other thickets for loafing and roosting; and nesting orioles to parasitize.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: California breeding population migrates south for winter, departing in late July or early August and returning in April.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Breeding season apparently extends from late April into late July. A brood

parasite; lays eggs in nests of other birds, particularly those of hooded and northern orioles (in California). Mating system unknown. Female usually lays 1 egg in each host nest; occasionally 2 females lay in same nest, and as many as 4 eggs have been found in a nest (Terres 1980). Total yearly egg production by each female is unknown. Incubation, by host parent(s), lasts 10-13 days (Friedmann 1929, Ehrlich et al. 1988). Altricial young leave nest at about 11 days and are fed by host parent(s) for about 2 wk longer (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Tends to parasitize larger hosts than does brown-headed cowbird, but these 2 cowbirds exploit many of the same hosts, suggesting possible competition in areas of sympatry (Robbins and Easterla 1981). Female may pierce host eggs. Little information available on effects of nest parasitism on host populations, which include at least 77 species, mostly orioles and other Emberizidae, Subfamilies Cardinalinae, Emberizinae, and Icterinae (Friedmann 1963). Gregarious; flocks at all seasons except when breeding (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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