

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

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE

Icterus bullockii

Family: ICTERIDAE
B532

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common to common, summer resident throughout most of California. Breeds primarily in valley foothill riparian, valley foothill hardwood, and valley foothill hardwood-conifer habitats, and corresponding montane habitats, especially in open stands of large trees. Frequents riparian deciduous trees and deciduous oaks. Breeding in coniferous forests limited to stands with substantial numbers of hardwoods. Breeds most commonly in interior northern California and coastal southern California; common locally in southern deserts, and absent from higher mountains. Rare to uncommon in winter in southern coastal areas, primarily in introduced flowering trees and shrubs, especially eucalyptus (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: About 80%, or more, of diet is insects and spiders (Martin et al. 1961); remainder consists of berries, other fruits, buds, and nectar. Gleans tree foliage and, less often, shrubs or herbaceous vegetation (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Commonly feeds at hummingbird feeders in suburban areas, and occasionally hawks flying insects.

Cover: Roosts, resting places, other cover provided by trees, particularly riparian deciduous species and deciduous oaks.

Reproduction: Typically nests in open stands of large trees; sycamores, cottonwoods, willows, deciduous oaks; also in live oaks, orchard trees, and occasionally conifers (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Nest hidden in tree foliage; usually 1.8 to 4.5 m (6-15 ft) above ground, but occasionally up to 15 m (50 ft) (Bent 1958, Schaefer 1976).

Water: Although often found near water, apparently does not require drinking water (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Bent 1958).

Pattern: Breeds in open stands of large, preferably deciduous, trees. In winter in California, mostly limited to introduced flowering trees and shrubs, especially eucalyptus.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Most breeders leave territory by July and wander extensively before migrating south to Mexico and Central America. Fall migration mostly occurs in August and early September; spring migration mostly in late March and early April (Grinnell and Miller 1944). A few winter in coastal southern California

Home Range: In Kansas, a family group had a home range of 0.85 ha (2.1 ac) for 3 wk in

late August and early September (Fitch 1958). In riparian woodlands in California, Oklahoma, Nevada, and Utah, breeding density varied from 3.0 to 16.8 pairs per ha (2.5 ac) (Pleasants 1979). Breeding density per 40 ha (100 ac) was 16-25 males in Sacramento Valley riparian forests (Gaines 1974a), and 13 pairs in a cottonwood forest in Montana (Walcheck 1970). In Carmel Valley, there were 12 nests in 0.3 ha (0.75 ac) in 1978, and 15 nests in 0.28 ha (0.69 ac) in 1979 (Airola 1980).

Territory: In riparian woodlands in California, Oklahoma, Nevada and Utah, defended a nesting territory; distance between neighboring nests averaged 12.7 to 53.5 m (41.9 to 176.6 ft) in different study areas (Pleasants 1979). Foraging areas outside riparian woodlands were not defended. A small, winter feeding territory was defended in Costa Rica (Schemske 1975) and Mexico (Cruden and Hermann-Parker 1977).

Reproduction: Breeding season early April into late July. A monogamous, sometimes solitary and sometimes loosely colonial nester (Pleasants 1979, Airola 1980). Clutch size usually 4 or 5, range 3-6; a single brood raised yearly. Incubation about 14 days; altricial young tended by both parents (Harrison 1978). Young fly first at about 14 days (Terres 1980).

Niche: Crows, magpies, jays, squirrels rob nests (Bent 1958). A frequent host of bronzed cowbird along Colorado River (Garrett and Dunn 1981), but apparently parasitized only rarely by brown-headed cowbird (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Comments: Two forms occur in California: eastern form known previously as Baltimore oriole, and the much more abundant western form known previously as Bullock's oriole (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Small 1974, McCaskie et al. 1979, 1988, Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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