

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

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GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH

*Leucosticte tephrocotis*

Family: FRINGILLIDAE

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B534

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common resident of high Sierra Nevada; uncommon on Mt. Shasta, Mt. Lassen, and Sweetwater and White Mts., Mono Co. Occurs primarily in alpine dwarf-shrub habitat and barren areas above treeline. An uncommon, local winter resident in rocky habitats at all elevations throughout Great Basin from Oregon border south to Inyo Mts. Breeds primarily at 2900-4300 m (9500-14,000 ft) elevation in Sierra Nevada from Lake Tahoe south to Olancho Peak, Tulare Co. Has been observed in late May on Sierra Buttes, Sierra Co., and Castle and Basin peaks, Nevada Co., and may breed in these locations (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Johnson 1975, Airola 1981, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Forages on ground for seeds of grasses and forbs and insects, also at edges of or on snowfields, and, to a lesser extent, on talus, cliff faces, lake and stream banks, and meadows. Also strips seeds from herbaceous plants and hawks flying insects. Occasionally gleans food from shrubs or small trees (Twining 1940, Bent 1968). Proportions of insects and seeds in diet vary with availability, but seeds apparently are the major foods in nonbreeding season.

**Cover:** Rocks and ground vegetation provide cover. In winter, uses mine shafts, cliff swallow nests, bridge supports, buildings, other similar areas for communal roosts (Mewaldt and Farner 1953, Bent 1968, Gaines 1977b).

**Reproduction:** Usually conceals nest in crevice on rock face or in talus with large boulders; also may use abandoned mineshaft, rock wall of building, underside of bridge, or similar location. Bulky nest made of mosses, grasses, feathers, hairs.

**Water:** Known to eat snow and to drink water regularly (Leffingwell and Leffingwell 1931, Shaw 1936, Johnson 1965).

**Pattern:** Breeders most numerous above treeline where there are steep, typically glacier-carved cliffs or large talus slopes providing nesting sites; alpine meadows, fell-fields, tarns, and lakes providing seed-producing alpine vegetation and insects; and perennial snowfields. Winter ecology largely unstudied; at that season apparently most numerous on alpine slopes blown free of snow, or in open, rocky habitats and roadsides at lower elevations.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

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

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** California breeders apparently nomadic rather than migratory, moving downslope or elsewhere in response to weather and food conditions, but

more study needed. Many that winter in Great Basin breed to north or northeast; present in California only from October to April.

Home Range: Breeders may forage 0.8 km (0.5 mi) from nest (Twining 1938), and probably much farther.

Territory: Each male defends an area within about 30 m (95 ft) of his mate, keeping other males away (Twining 1938). Apparently a fixed territory not defended.

Reproduction: Breeding season early June into mid-August, with a peak in July. Monogamous; lays 2-6 eggs per clutch, usually 4 or 5, and raises 1 brood per season. Incubation 12-14 days, by female only. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 14-16 days (Bent 1968, Harrison 1978).

Niche: May occur in mixed flocks in winter, especially with juncos, sparrows, pine siskins (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.