

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

PURPLE FINCH

Haemorhous purpureus

Family: FRINGILLIDAE
B536

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common resident in northern California and fairly common in the south. Occurs in coastal foothills and lowlands, and breeds at middle elevations in most mountain ranges. For breeding, prefers moist, shady stands of mixed conifer and other coniferous habitats, as well as hardwood, hardwood-conifer, and riparian habitats, with nearby forest openings. In interior and southern portions of the state, breeds near streams or in moist canyon bottoms. In coniferous forests, apparently prefers stands with substantial numbers of oaks or other hardwoods. Sometimes ranges widely to forage in chaparral, grasslands, or wet meadows. Does not breed in interior lowlands or foothills, and rather rare there in winter. On eastern slopes of Cascade Range and Sierra Nevada, does not occur regularly in winter and apparently rather rare as a breeder (Airola 1980), but breeding status needs clarification. Winter distribution in California varies erratically, apparently in response to food supply (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Major foods in spring and summer include flowers, seeds, berries, buds, and (to a lesser extent) insects (Salt 1952). Winter diet is similar, but includes fewer insects. Because plant foods often taken directly from trees and shrubs, and insects are gleaned from foliage, less dependent on open areas for feeding than are house and Cassin's finches (Salt 1952). Does, however, range widely to forage in chaparral, grasslands, and meadows (Grinnell and Miller 1944), where often searches for seeds on ground.

Cover: Trees and tall shrubs provide cover.

Reproduction: Nest usually near end of a horizontal branch, 1.8 to 12 m (6-40 ft), or even 15 m (50 ft) above ground. Nest usually built in a conifer, sometimes in an oak, cottonwood, or alder, usually near edge of a forest opening (Salt 1952), and preferably near water.

Water: Requires either drinking water or moist food, such as fleshy fruits, flowers, insects (Salt 1952). In a coastal oak woodland, it was not observed drinking (Williams and Koenig 1980).

Pattern: For breeding, prefers moist, shady coniferous forest, oak woodland, or riparian woodland near forest openings, and usually near water. Often forages in forest openings and along forest edges.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Over much of California breeding range, present all year.

Those breeding on eastern slopes of Cascade Range and Sierra Nevada, however, depart for winter (Airola 1980), and those breeding at relatively high elevations move downslope below deep snows. From October to April, more widespread in foothills and lowlands west of Sierra Nevada crest and in southern California, because of migrants from the north as well as from upslope (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Occurs irregularly as a migrant on Farallon Islands (DeSante and Ainley 1980).

Home Range: No information found. Density in a California bay-Bishop pine-mixed forest was 22 males per 40 ha (100 ac) (Stewart 1974).

Territory: No information found.

Reproduction: Nesting season in California may begin as early as mid-April, but usually in May. Monogamous; whether nests solitarily only or also near other pairs is uncertain. Lays 3-6 eggs per clutch, usually 4 or 5. May be double-brooded in some cases in California (Bent 1968). Incubation lasts 13 days. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 13-14 days, but are fed for several days thereafter (Harrison 1978). Probably first attempts to breed at 1 yr. Yearling male sings and is ready to breed physiologically, but does not attain reddish-purple adult plumage until second yr (Grinnell and Storer 1924).

Niche: Competition with house finch important in eastern U.S. May form unisex flocks of 20-30 postbreeding. Somewhat gregarious in winter; may flock with siskins, goldfinches, other finches (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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