

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

HOUSE FINCH

Haemorhous mexicanus

Family: FRINGILLIDAE
B538

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant resident throughout much of California, except in montane habitats and in arid regions away from water. Most common in valley foothill hardwood, valley foothill hardwood-conifer, and riparian habitats, as well as in desert riparian, palm oasis, orchard-vinyard, and urban habitats. Occurs in open woodlands and brushlands, along edges of denser stands, and in grassland and desert habitats. Flourishes in urban and cropland habitats. Mostly limited to such areas in montane regions, but small numbers occur in undisturbed habitats, especially at lower montane elevations and in migration. Apparently less common or absent in winter east of Cascade Range and Sierra Nevada, but status at that season requires further study (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). In Mono Co., numbers augmented by a large influx of migrants in late summer, but absent in winter (Gaines 1977b).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Seeds of grasses and forbs are principal foods; buds, berries and other small fruits also important, but only eats small amounts of insects (Martin et al. 1961, Bent 1968). Typically forages on ground or pick seeds and fruits from plants while clinging to stems or branches. Seeds of composites especially favored (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Cover: Prefers to forage in areas with elevated escape perches such as trees, tall shrubs, transmission lines, buildings. Roosts and nests in sheltered sites in trees, tall, dense shrubs or vine tangles, human-made structures, crevices in cliffs or earthen banks.

Reproduction: Builds nest in a variety of sites, usually shaded overhead and often partly enclosed; in dense foliage of tree, tall shrub or vine, human-made structure (e.g., under eaves or in cavity), crevice in cliff or earthen bank, loose bark on eucalyptus tree, hollow limb, old bird nest. On southern Channel Islands, often nests in cactus. Nest height usually 1.8 to 6 m (6-20 ft) above ground, but varies from 0.9 to 15 m (3-50 ft) (Jones and Fichter 1961).

Water: Requires water daily, and may commute relatively long distances to drink. Fruits may be a partial substitute (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Pattern: Occupies a variety of open habitats with suitable nest and roost sites, elevated escape perches, and drinking water within daily commuting distance. Fruits may substitute for water.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Mostly not migratory. East of Cascade Range and Sierra

Nevada, however, much of breeding population apparently departs for winter. In Mono Co., along eastern base of Sierra Nevada, breeding population departs for winter, but there is a large influx of migrants in late summer (Gaines 1977b). Some wandering apparent, especially in late summer, including limited upslope movements.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: In Berkeley, each male defended an area around his mate, but area around nest was defended only weakly and sporadically (Thompson 1960). During nest-building, when defense was most vigorous, 6 territories varied in radius from 1.8 to 9.1 m (6-30 ft), averaging 4.3 m (14 ft) around nest.

Reproduction: Nesting usually begins in March or April. A monogamous breeder; many pairs may nest near each other. Lays 2-6 eggs per clutch, usually 4 or 5; often raises 2 or even 3 broods per yr. Incubation lasts 12-14 days. Altricial young tended by both parents. Young leave nest at 14-16 days, but fed by parents for several days thereafter. Probably breeds first at 1 yr (Harrison 1978).

Niche: In Sacramento, almost entire loss of young was caused by domestic cats (Eviden 1957). House sparrows are strong competitors for nest sites. According to Thompson (1960), house sparrows almost always won fights between the 2 species in California. House sparrows may destroy large numbers of nests, eggs, and young (Bergtold 1913). However, competition between these 2 species appears to be an important factor in decline in house sparrow numbers in eastern U.S. in recent decades after introduction of house finch in 1940s (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.