

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

PINE SISKIN

Family: FRINGILLIDAE
B542

Spinus pinus

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Breeds commonly in higher mountains throughout most of California, and at lower elevations in humid coastal ranges and coastal slope south through Monterey Co. Frequents open coniferous forests for nesting, but often feeds in riparian and herbaceous habitats. Breeds most commonly in lodgepole pine (Beedy 1982) and subalpine conifer habitats. Along coast, prefers valley foothill riparian, closed-cone pine-cypress, Douglas-fir, and redwood habitats. Breeds in Warner Mts., but apparently not in mountain ranges east of Sierra Nevada; in southern California breeds only at high elevations from Mt. Pinos south through Transverse Ranges to San Jacinto Mts. In winter, unpredictable downslope and southward migration often depopulates higher mountains and may carry many to foothills and lowlands. Outside breeding range, may be rare to fairly common, or even common in exceptional years. Occurs widely in open woodlands and herbaceous habitats in winter, but only irregularly in deserts of Great Basin and southern California. Even breeding populations vary erratically from year to year (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Diet consists primarily of seeds and flower heads of herbs, seeds and buds of conifers and deciduous trees (including exotics), and insects and spiders. Other foods include eucalyptus nectar and sap from sapsucker borings. Insects and spiders are the major foods in summer, but plant foods predominate at other seasons (Martin et al. 1961). Gleans insects and spiders from ground, foliage, and tree bark. Plucks seeds and buds from trees and herbs, and gleans seeds from ground. Often feeds on waste grain at stables and pack stations (Gaines 1977b), and eats salt at salt blocks or along roadsides.

Cover: Most cover provided by conifers and other trees (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Reproduction: Nest concealed in dense foliage, typically well out on a horizontal branch of a tall conifer, but occasionally in a hardwood tree. Nest located 0.9 to 15 m (3-50 ft) above ground, usually at middle heights and rarely below 2.4 m (8 ft) (Bent 1968).

Water: Drinks water regularly (Smyth and Coulombe 1971) and often bathes (Bent 1968); water probably essential.

Pattern: Frequents tall trees in open coniferous forests for nesting, roosting, resting; often feeds in riparian, meadow, and other herbaceous habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Often wanders unpredictably postbreeding. At higher

breeding elevations, common some winters, absent others. Mostly rare to fairly common outside breeding range October to April, but common and especially widespread some years. Apparently both downslope and southward migration in fall (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Garrett and Dunn (1981) suggested that most wintering in southern California probably are migrants from the north or from out of state.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: Usually nests in a loose colony with nests a few m apart (Bent 1968). One territory in New Hampshire included an area 0.9 to 1.8 m (3-6 ft) in diameter around nest (Weaver and West 1943).

Reproduction: In California, breeding season typically begins in April or May (Bent 1968). A monogamous, social breeder, usually nests in a loose colony, sometimes solitarily (Bent 1968). Lays 2-6 eggs per clutch, usually 3-5; may be double-brooded. Incubation lasts about 13 days. Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at 14-15 days. Probably breeds first at 1 yr (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Often occurs in mixed winter flocks of 50-200 with goldfinches, juncos, crossbills. Attracted to salt along roadsides (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.