

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

LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH

Spinus lawrencei

Family: FRINGILLIDAE
B544

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Highly erratic and localized in occurrence. Rather common along western edge of southern deserts, fairly common but erratic from year to year in Santa Clara Co. (Kaiser 1976) and on coastal slope from Monterey Co. south, and uncommon in foothills surrounding Central Valley. Present mostly from April through September. Breeds in open oak or other arid woodland and chaparral, near water. Rarely breeds along immediate coast. Typical habitats include valley foothill hardwood, valley foothill hardwood-conifer, and, in southern California, desert riparian, palm oasis, pinyon-juniper, and lower montane habitats. Nearby herbaceous habitats often used for feeding. Winters erratically in southern coastal lowlands and Colorado River Valley; can be common locally. Small numbers also winter in northern California (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats mostly seeds; also a few insects. Favored seeds include pigweed, fiddleneck, starthistle, and chamise (Martin et al. 1961). Feeds on forbs and shrubs, plucking seeds from plants. Also gleans seeds from ground.

Cover: Uses trees and shrubs for nesting, resting, escape, and other cover. Perches on fences and transmission wires.

Reproduction: Builds nest in dense foliage of a tree or shrub. Prefers to nest in an oak; also uses cypress or planting of deodar cedar (Grinnell and Miller 1944), riparian thicket, other species (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Most often nests near water in open, arid woodland (Garrett and Dunn 1981), but also uses chaparral.

Water: Apparently requires drinking water (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Linsdale 1950); often bathes (Linsdale 1950, Coutlee 1968b).

Pattern: Requires open woodland or shrubland, a nearby source of water, and forb and shrub seeds.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Most individuals that breed in California winter in other southwestern states and in northern Mexico, and are absent from September to March. Moderate numbers winter erratically in southern coastal lowlands and Colorado River Valley, but few remain in northern California.

Home Range: In Monterey Co., ranged up to 0.8 km (0.5 mi) from nest to feed or drink

(Linsdale 1957).

Territory: Diameter of territory around nest was 18-22 m (60-72 ft) (Linsdale 1950) and 11 m (36 ft) (Linsdale 1957) in Monterey Co., and 10-15 m (33-50 ft) elsewhere in California (Coutlee 1968a). Occasionally nests colonially: Hanna (in Bent 1968) reported "a dozen" nests in a small juniper, and Dawson (1923) recorded 10 nests in 2 adjacent trees.

Reproduction: Breeding season begins in late March or early April. A monogamous breeder; nests singly or near several other pairs. Lays 3-6 eggs per clutch, usually 4 or 5. Incubation lasts 12-13 days (Coutlee 1966). Altricial young tended by both parents and leave nest at about 11 days. Probably breeds first at 1 yr (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Apparently some competition for nest sites between lesser and Lawrence's goldfinches (Coutlee 1966). Closely associated with oaks. Occurs in flocks throughout year, sometimes with other seedeaters; other goldfinches, house finches, juncos, lark sparrows. Attracted to salt (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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