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

NORTHERN CARDINAL *Cardinalis cardinalis*
Family: CARDINALIDAE Order: PASSERIFORMES Class: AVES
B806

Written by: T. Kucera, 1998

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, SEASONALITY

The subspecies of northern cardinal native to the southwest, C. c. superba, is a rare resident along the lower Colorado River in California (Garrett and Dunn 1981). It was first reported by Monson (1949). According to Small (1994), the entire population may comprise only a few pairs, and these few may be declining. Northern cardinals seen in Los Angeles County and along the extreme south coast are probably escaped caged birds (Small 1994).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: No diet information specific to California. Probably feeds on insects, seeds, and fruit in brushy riparian thickets and desert scrub (Ehrlich et al 1988, Small 1994).

Cover: Dense shrubs in riparian areas and desert scrub provide cover.

Reproduction: No information specific to California. Nests in shrubs and small trees in other areas (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Water: No information.

Pattern: Rare inhabitant of sense, brush riparian areas and desert scrub along the lower Colorado River.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Active during the day.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Not known. Probably resident year-long.

Home Range: Not known.

Territory: Probably territorial, but not well studied in California yet.

Reproduction: Not well known. In other areas, northern cardinals are monogamous, and lay up to four broods of three to four eggs during spring and early summer in cup nest in a shrub or small tree. The male cares for the first brood while the female incubates the second clutch (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Niche: Inhabitant of dense, desert riparian areas and desert scrub; cowbird host in other areas (Ehrlich et al. 1988). May be preyed upon by usual vertebrate predators, e.g., accipitors and owls.

REFERENCES

Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster,

New York.
Garrett, K. and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of Southern California: status and distribution. Los Angeles Audubon Society, Los Angeles.
Monson, G. 1949. Recent notes from the lower Colorado River Valley of Arizona and California. Condor 51:229-230.
Small, A. 1994. California birds: their status and distribution. Ibis Publishing Co., Vista, CA.

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