

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

RINGTAIL

Bassariscus astutus

Family: PROCYONIDAE
M152

Order: CARNIVORA

Class: MAMMALIA

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Widely distributed, common to uncommon permanent resident. Occurs in various riparian habitats, and in brush stands of most forest and shrub habitats, at low to middle elevations. Little information available on distribution and relative abundance among habitats (Grinnell et al. 1937, Schempf and White 1977).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Primarily carnivorous, eating mainly rodents (woodrats and mice) and rabbits. Also takes substantial amounts of birds and eggs, reptiles, invertebrates, fruits, nuts, and some carrion (Taylor 1954, Trapp 1978). Forages on ground, among rocks, in trees; usually near water.

Cover: Hollow trees, logs, snags, cavities in talus and other rocky areas, and other recesses are used for cover.

Reproduction: Nests in rock recesses, hollow trees, logs, snags, abandoned burrows, or woodrat nests.

Water: Usually not found more than 1 km (0.6 mi) from permanent water.

Pattern: Suitable habitat for ringtails consists of a mixture of forest and shrubland in close association with rocky areas or riparian habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Nocturnal; active yearlong.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Non-migratory.

Home Range: In California, home ranges were estimated to vary from 44-515 ha (109-1280 ac) (Grinnell et al. 1937). Average home ranges of 20-43 ha (49-106 ac) were reported for a small number of ringtails in Texas (Toweill and Teer 1981). Also in Texas, densities of 61 km² (16/mi²) have been reported (Taylor 1954, Toweill and Teer 1981). Density estimated as high as 10.5 to 20.5/km² (27.2 to 53.1 /mi²) in Central Valley (Belluomin 1980, Poglajen-Neuwall and Toweill 1988).

Territory: No information found. In Texas, home ranges of females were separated widely; home ranges of males overlapped those of females (Toweill and Teer 1981).

Reproduction: Young reportedly often born in May and June (Walker et al. 1968). One

litter/yr; average of 3 young, range 1-5. Gestation from 40-50 days. Females may drive males away 3-4 days prior to giving birth.

Niche: Probable predators include bobcats, raccoons, foxes, and especially large owls. Trapp (1972) discussed the ringtail's adaptation to rough, broken terrain, including naked soles of feet providing traction on smooth surfaces, ability to rotate hindfeet in half circle dexterous forefeet with limited opposability of first 2 digits, and numerous behavioral adaptations. Potential competition for food exists between ringtails and many sympatric species (e.g., raccoons, gray foxes, coyotes, barn owls, great horned owls, rattlesnakes, gopher snakes).

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