

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

GREATER SCAUP

Aythya marila

Family: ANATIDAE
B093

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

In California, a common winter resident October through March on larger bays, estuaries, and occasionally on emergent wetlands of central and northern California. Most abundant on San Francisco Bay; a few occur south to Morro and San Diego bays (Bellrose 1976). Generally less abundant in southern California (Small 1974). Does not breed in California, although a few remain through summer. Occurs occasionally October through May, and in migration, on inland lakes east through Central Valley, and in northeastern and southeastern California (Cogswell 1977). In winter, frequents large, coastal waters with abundant plant and animal life, but usually avoids mudflats.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds by diving to bottom in water up to 7 m (23 ft) deep. In wintering areas, feeds extensively on mollusks, crustaceans, and insects. More than 90% of food eaten on Humboldt Bay was mollusks (Yocom and Keller 1961). In breeding season, eats more vegetation. Ingests gravel.

Cover: May retreat to sea in response to human disturbance. Flocks move away from boats when hunted.

Reproduction: Breeds principally north of 60° N lat. in Alaska. Nests on marshy, low tundra, adjacent to ponds, in bowl-shaped depressions lined with grass (Bellrose 1976). Nests on open sites, with good visibility and easy access to water.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Requires sheltered, mostly large bays and inshore waters. In California, rarely occurs on fresh water.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: On the Pacific Coast, migration occurs between breeding grounds in Alaska and wintering grounds from Puget Sound south. Migrates via an offshore corridor over Gulf of Alaska, and a limited interior migration route through Yukon Territory.

Home Range: Sociable, and frequently colonial. Home range poorly defined. Nest density up to 2.5/ ha (1 / ac). Winter flocks of several thousand move over large areas.

Territory: Defends only immediate area of nest.

Reproduction: Eggs laid May and June. Clutch size averages 7-10 (range = 5-22); 1 clutch per yr. Female incubates; usually less than 28 days. Hatching occurs July and August. Precocial young are independent at 5-6 wk. Nests often very close, or touch one another; may result in large clutches laid by more than 1 female (Johnsgard 1978). In Alaska, only 25% of 16 and 45% of 20 nests hatched successfully (Bellrose 1976).

Niche: Crows and ravens prey on eggs and young. Herring gulls sometimes steal food from adults. Eggs and nestlings taken by predatory mammals; adults and young taken by peregrine falcons, bald eagles, and other birds of prey. One of the principal game species on open bays.

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