

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

MOUNTAIN PLOVER

Charadrius montanus

Family: CHARADRIIDAE
B159

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Population declining and very local; occasionally fairly common. Winter resident from September through March. Found on short grasslands and plowed fields of the Central Valley from Sutter and Yuba cos. southward. Also found in foothill valleys west of San Joaquin Valley, Imperial Valley, plowed fields of Los Angeles and western San Bernardino counties, and along the central Colorado river valley. Recent extralimital records exist for locations along the northern coast of California (Hunting and Edson 2008). Winters below 1000 m (3200 ft).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Searches on the ground for large insects, especially grasshoppers (Graul 1976a).

Cover: Avoids high and dense cover. Uses open grasslands, plowed fields with little vegetation, and open sagebrush areas. Often roosts in depressions such as ungulate hoof prints and plow furrows (Knopf and Rupert 1995).

Reproduction: Does not nest in California. Nests in high-elevation grassland, often blue grama and buffalo grass patches (Graul 1975).

Water: Water requirements met from food items. Opportunistic drinking from rain puddles has been observed (Luan 1957).

Pattern: Frequents open plains with low, herbaceous or scattered shrub vegetation.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Breeds from northern Montana and North Dakota south in the Great Plains to southeastern New Mexico and Texas. Winters from northern California, southern Arizona, and central Texas south into north-central Mexico (Cogswell 1977).

Home Range: Nests widely spaced within a nesting area. Graul (1975) found 21 nests/65 ha (162 ac), with an average distance between nests of 140 m (425 ft). Ranges widely in winter flocks, sometimes of 100 or more.

Territory: Mean territory in prairie grasslands in Colorado was 16 ha (40 ac). May occupy same territory year after year (Graul 1975, 1976b). Defends territory against conspecifics, longspurs, and horned larks in breeding season. Usually not territorial in nonbreeding seasons, but may defend a small, mobile feeding space.

Reproduction: Breeds from late April through June; peak in late May (Bent 1929). Female lays an average clutch of 3 eggs (range = 1-4). In years of abundant food, male may incubate and brood young while female lays another clutch, often tended by another male (Ehrlich et al. 1988.)

Niche: Eggs and young preyed upon by ground squirrels, kit foxes, coyotes, badgers, skunks, and snakes; adults are caught by raptors.

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