

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

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN *Lagopus leucura*
Family: PHASIANIDAE Order: GALLIFORMES Class: AVES
B135

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Introduced into alpine habitats in the Sierra Nevada at Mono Pass, Mono Co. by the California Department of Fish and Game in 1971-72. Apparently breeding successfully, and expanding its range (Spencer 1976a, Gaines 1977b). Areas with at least 50% rock cover are preferred, but associated with willows at all times of the year. No detailed studies of the California population have been published.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Willow buds and twigs are major foods at all seasons, in addition to alder catkins. Also grazes and gleans from ground and low plants. Chicks mostly eat invertebrates (Choate 1963).

Cover: Areas with rock cover and low alpine shrubs are preferred (Johnsgard 1975a).

Reproduction: Nests on the ground in a variety of sites, generally near alpine meadows. Brooding areas are near rock cover with adjacent short vegetation. Nests are depressions in the ground, sparsely lined with grass or feathers.

Water: No data found.

Pattern: During spring and summer, dependent on alpine meadows and rocky areas. In winter, some individuals move downslope into early successional stages of lodgepole pine (May and Braun 1972).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Moves upslope in late summer, and downslope in winter in response to snow cover and food availability (May and Braun 1972). Juvenile moves farther downslope in winter than adult (Hoffman and Braun 1975).

Home Range: No information on home range found. As many as 400/mi² (155/km²) have been counted in winter range in Rocky Mt. National Park in Colorado.

Territory: Breeding territory varied from 7-19 ha (16-47 ac), with a mean of 14 ha (36 ac) in Colorado (Schmidt 1969).

Reproduction: No data available for California population. Outside California, breeding primarily monogamous; begins in mid-June. Clutch of 4-7 eggs laid; 1 brood/yr. Incubation is by female alone for 22-23 days. Young are precocial; tended by both parents, and fledged at about 10 days. Brood stays together through the winter (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Hawks, eagles and martens are predators in California (Rue 1973).

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