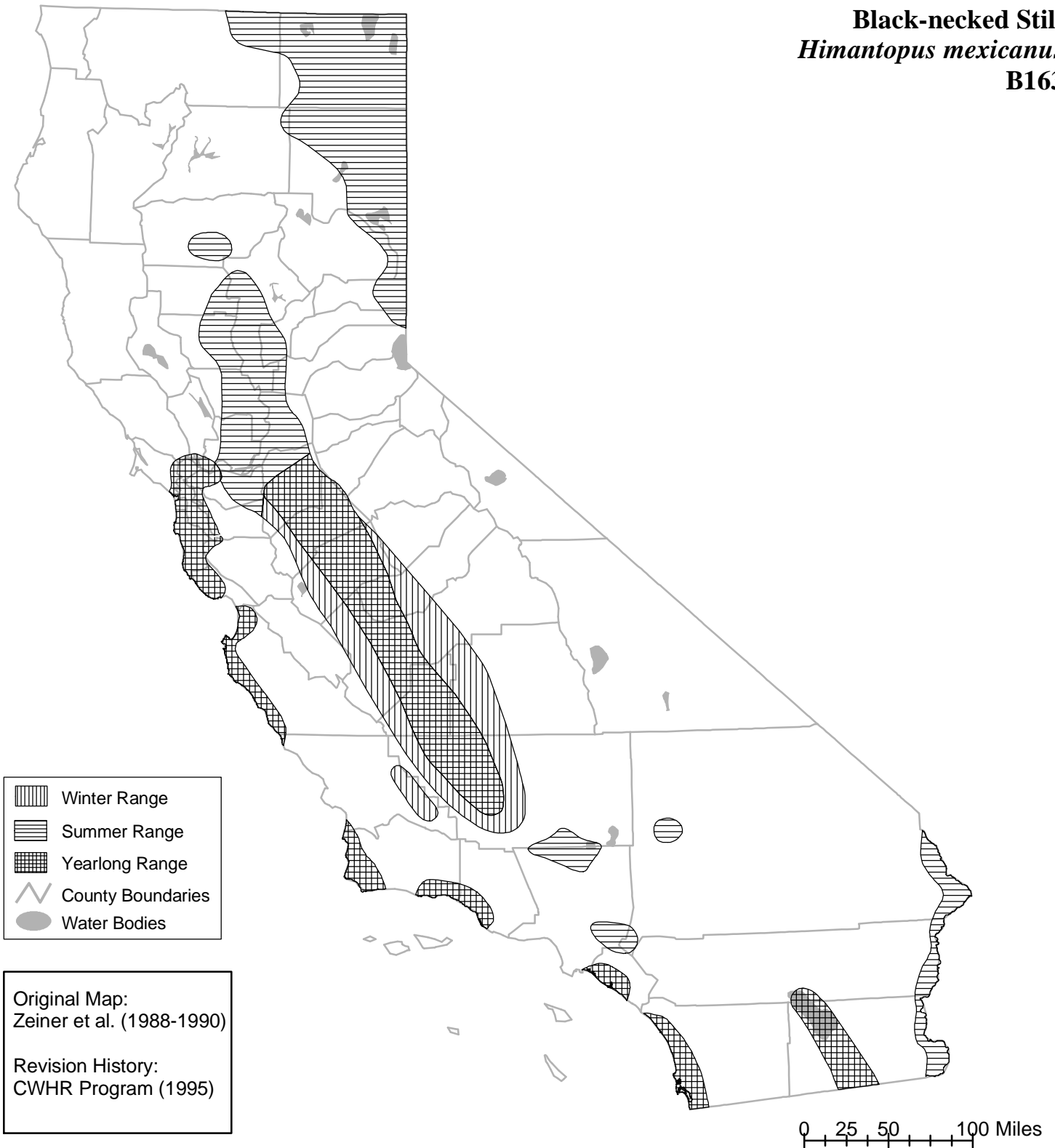


California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System

California Department of Fish and Game

California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* B163



Range maps are based on available occurrence data and professional knowledge. They represent current, but not historic or potential, range. Unless otherwise noted above, maps 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 maps that have been added or edited since original publication.

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BLACK-NECKED STILT

Himantopus mexicanus

Family: RECURVIROSTRIDAE
B163

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: M. Rigney
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common, yearlong resident, patchily distributed in the Central Valley and along the coast of California from San Francisco Bay south. It is found in estuarine, salt pond, lacustrine, and saline emergent wetland habitats, and locally in fresh emergent wetland and seasonally ponded wetlands. Winters regularly in the San Joaquin Valley, where it is locally common (McCaskie et al. 1979). Common to locally abundant in the same habitats April through September in southern California. Occurs year-round at the Salton Sea. Commonly breeds along lake shores in northeastern California and along the Colorado River (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Use of salt evaporation ponds has increased significantly since 1960; this now seems to be the primary wintering habitat (Cogswell 1979).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages in shallow water for insects, crustaceans, mollusks, other aquatic invertebrates, and some small fish. Prefers the shallows of lakeshores, flooded alkali flats, salt ponds, coastal estuaries, and flooded fields (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Gleans and probes for invertebrates from mud and shallow waters.

Cover: Rests and roosts on salt pond levees, dikes, alkali flats, islands in shallow water, and lake shores.

Reproduction: Requires open areas of friable soil, mudflats, levees, and dry lakeshores for nesting. These areas generally are located less than 1 km (0.6 mi) from a feeding area (Hamilton 1975). The nest is a shallow scrape in the ground, often lined with wetland plants, feathers of other birds, or cobble. Nest located on levees, islands, shorelines of lakes, and over water in heavy grass.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: No additional data found.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: A yearlong resident along the central and southern California coast, the San Joaquin Valley, and at the Salton Sea. Populations using Sierra Nevada and northeastern plateau lakes for breeding, migrate to lowland and coastal area in August and September.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Defends an "extensive" area around groups of nests. Several pairs may join in defense (Hamilton 1975). In his study of California populations, Hamilton (1975) found nests averaged 22 m (68 ft) apart, with a range of 2-42 m (6-130 ft).

Reproduction: Breeds from late April through August, with a peak in June (Bent 1927). Semicolonial; usually nests in loose groups near feeding areas (Hamilton 1975). Clutch size averages 4; range 3-5. Both adults incubate eggs, for 23-25 days. Young precocial (Harrison 1978); brooded on the nest site for up to 2 days after hatching, although capable of rapid movement, and can swim within 2 hr after hatching (Hamilton 1975)

Niche: Often nests very close to water; consequently, greatly affected by fluctuations in water levels of lakes or ponds. Many nests have been observed abandoned or submerged in salt ponds in the San Francisco Bay area as water levels are adjusted during salt production (Rigney and Rigney 1981).

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- Hartwick (1974) listed gull predation as an important form of egg and chick mortality. Human and domestic animal disturbance on Farallon Islands apparently prevented oystercatchers from breeding between 1860 and the 1950s (Ainley and Lewis 1974). Recreational activity on or near rocky intertidal areas may prevent breeding. Oil spills can affect food supplies by fouling foraging habitats, but losses from direct oiling probably would be low. Storm waves destroy some nests.

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