

**WESTERN YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO
(COCYZUS AMERICANUS OCCIDENTALIS)**

Federal/California status: --/Endangered



Description

The western yellow-billed cuckoo is a slender, long-tailed bird with a moderately long, curved bill. The upper part of the bill is black, the lower portion is yellow to orange, and the hooked tip is black. It is grayish brown above with dull white underparts. Six, large white spots on the underside of the tail are apparent both in flight and while perched. A skulky, secretive species, it is more often heard than

observed. The stuttering, croaking call: ka-ka-ka-ka-kow-kow-kow-kow- kowlp-kowlp-kowlp is audible at great distances.

Habitat

The western yellow-billed cuckoo inhabits open woodlands with clearings and low, dense, scrubby vegetation. In California, it prefers riparian woodlands of willow (*Salix* spp.) and Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*). Diet consists of large insects including caterpillars, katydids, cicadas, and grasshoppers. It frequently forages by gleaning insects from the leaves and stems of vegetation and will run along limbs in pursuit of prey items. The nest typically is placed on a horizontal branch or vertical fork of a tree or large shrub approximately 3-20 feet (1-6 m) above the ground. The nest is a loose, flat, oblong platform of twigs lined with dry leaves and strips of bark.

Range/distribution

This subspecies has experienced drastic declines in California. Once considered a common summer visitant in appropriate riparian habitats within the San Joaquin Valley, the western yellow-billed cuckoo is now essentially extirpated from this area. Its extirpation is associated with the loss and fragmentation of the once extensive riparian areas that occurred throughout the Valley.

Photo: U.S. Geological Survey/photo by J. A. Spendelow, URL: <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/html/h3870pi.jpg>, accessed September 9, 2002

References

Grinnell, J., and A. Miller. 1944. *The Distribution of the Birds of California*. Cooper Ornithological Club, Berkeley, CA. 617 pp.

Hughes, J.M. 1999. Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 418 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.