

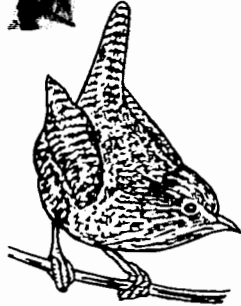
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Natural History Notes



MIKE DOMBECK grew up in the Moose Lake area and graduated from Hayward High School and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He has a B.S. degree in Biology and an M.S. degree in Aquatic Biology. He has taught Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and is now a fisheries biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, living in Munising, Michigan.



Wren

JENNY WREN

The wren appears to be one of our most active songbirds. It is constantly chattering and fluttering about in an ecstatic manner. No idle hours for this energetic little bird as it busily goes about its daily duties in an untiring fashion. Probably one of the most noticed birds around the yard because of its constant activity, the wren begins singing as dawn approaches. The male is by far the more vocal of the species. It is because of his bubbling song that it is dubbed "jenny wren."

The song of the wren, like that of most songbirds, functions to warn others of territorial boundaries or is part of a courtship ritual. Wrens not only defend their territory from other wrens, but will also vigorously chase away other species of birds. In fact, some bird watchers view the wren as a villainous creature since it does not live harmoniously with other birds. For its size the wren is very aggressive and pugnacious.

There are several species of wrens. The Western House Wren is the most common in Wisconsin. It ranges from Wisconsin to lower California, from British Columbia to Kentucky, and winters in Mexico. The Eastern House Wren is less common in this area and ranges east to New Brunswick and winters in the gulf states.

The Latin name for the wren family means cave dweller. It is most appropriate since most members of this family nest in cavities, old woodpecker holes, or construct cave-like nests. The female selects the nest site and is indifferent about its external appearance. It's what is inside the residence that concerns her. Wrens will nest in almost any shelter:

brush piles, tin cans, old shoes, under eaves, etc. A nest is constructed of twigs, grass, bark, spider webs, feathers and other soft materials.

The female is the homemaker and if the male isn't satisfied he leaves and the female will seek a new mate. The males are polygamous and are not loyal to their families. Five to 12 eggs about 1/2 x 2/3 inch are laid. They are usually pinkish-white with red-brown spots. Incubation time is 11 to 13 days and up to three broods each season are common.

The house wren is one of the smaller songbirds. It weighs about 2 oz. and is about 4-1/2" long. An easy bird to identify, the house wren is brownish, finely barred, with a rounded tail that is most often held cocked upright over its back. If its appearance isn't enough, it can be identified by its restless nature and loud singing, especially in the early morning hours. The primary food of the wren is insects and therefore they control many pesty bugs around the yard.

The wren has not gone unnoticed. The house wren is the state bird of Ohio. South Carolina's state bird is the Carolina wren. If you are a bird watcher you may be interested in attracting a wren family or two to your yard, that is if you don't mind noisy neighbors at 4:30 in the morning. Put up a small birdhouse with an entrance hole about one inch in diameter. It doesn't have to be a specially constructed fancy house; a gourd, coconut or even a tin can will do. If you're lucky, a wren family will take up residence in late April and you will be in for a treat the rest of the summer.

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