

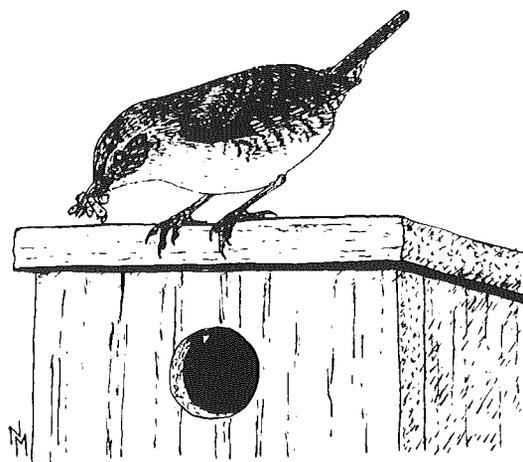
House Wren

Troglodytes aedon

House Wrens are small, plain, brown birds, more distinguished for their exuberant, melodious voices and frenetic behavior than for their outward appearance. Although far from abundant, House Wrens are among the more familiar inhabitants of yards, gardens, and farm hedgerows in the warmer parts of Vermont. They are cavity nesters, taking readily to birdhouses and utilizing a wide variety of natural and artificial cavities. House Wrens forage near the ground and thus prefer the cover provided by thick, brushy vegetation. These birds are not always associated with human habitation; isolated pairs may be found nesting in a variety of locales, including beaver ponds, swamps, hedgerows, and streamside thickets.

Male House Wrens return to Vermont in late April and early May; most are back by the first week of May. They immediately set about establishing territories by sounding their distinctive loud, bubbling warble, and begin claiming all available nest sites within their territories by building stick "nests" in all nearby cavities. Nest sites are generally located below 3 m (10 ft), and may be situated in bird boxes, open ends of metal piping, mailboxes, and preexisting cavities in trees and stumps, as well as in such sites as old wasp nests, felt hats, large skulls, and the abandoned nests of other birds. Upon encountering a hive of wasps or the eggs or young of some earlier arriving bird, the wren attempts to remove them, and usually succeeds. All male wrens share a penchant for constructing an array of "nests," whether mated or not; the NB code therefore is useless for confirming this species.

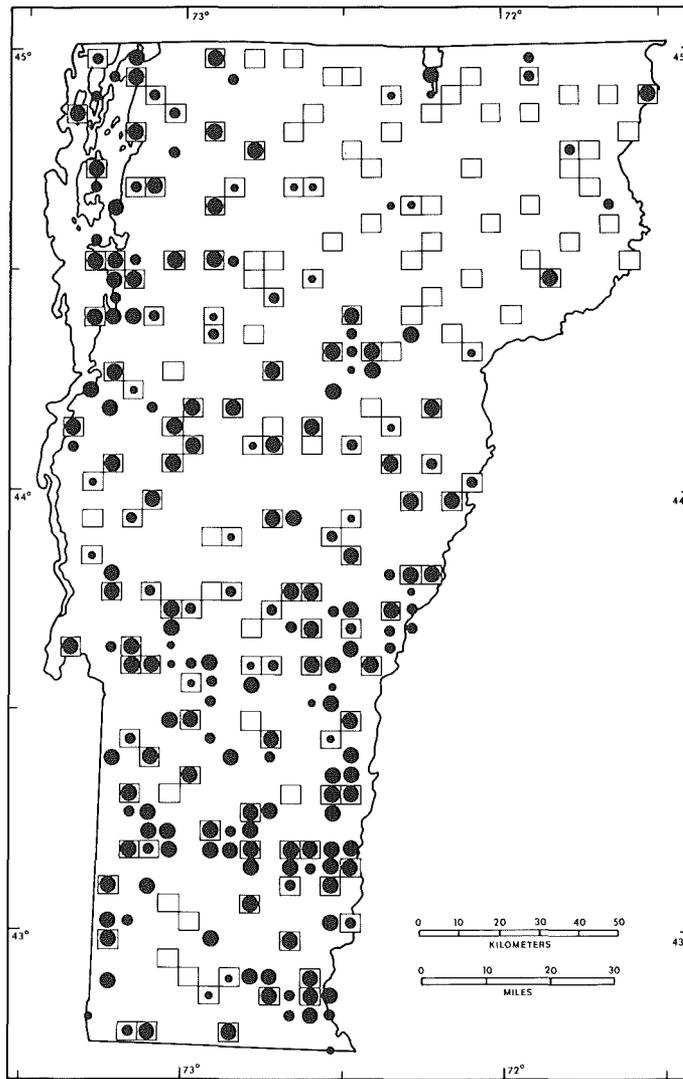
Females arrive in Vermont about a week after the males. A female will generally select one of the sites utilized by the male, rearrange the pile of sticks, and line this base with grasses or other soft, fibrous materials. She then proceeds to lay 4 to 8 white eggs that are so diffusely spotted with cinnamon brown as to obscure their color. Normal clutches consist of 6 or 7 eggs. Egg



dates for Vermont, determined from 10 clutches, range from May 18 to July 16. Records of 17 nests containing young include dates from June 10 to August 2; six dates for recently fledged young range from June 24 to August 8. Late fledgling dates suggest that eggs are sometimes laid as late as the first week of July. Although House Wrens are usually double-brooded, in northern Vermont most pairs probably only manage a single brood. The species' autumn migration is inconspicuous, probably peaking in September. In Vermont late birds have been noted into October in most years.

The first indication that a House Wren is present is the male's advertising song, given incessantly, especially in May and early June. Because the species readily accepts nest boxes, Atlas Project observers most frequently confirmed House Wrens by keeping an eye on nest boxes in yards with wrens. Three-quarters of the confirmed nestings were of active nests; a third of these confirmations were designated by use of the ON code, for cavity-nesting species.

The House Wren is fairly common and, for the most part, generally distributed in the Taconic Mountains, Champlain Lowlands, and Eastern Foothills. It is considerably less common, and more restricted to valleys, in the southern Green Mountains and the East Central region. House Wrens are rare at elevations above 458 m (1,502 ft), and absent above 641 m (2,102 ft). In the Northeast Kingdom (the combined



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 122 (68%)

Possible breeding: 20 (16% of total)

Probable breeding: 25 (21% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 77 (63% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	28	90	23.0
Green Mountains	33	61	27.0
North Central	4	2.1	3.2
Northeast Highlands	4	2.5	3.2
East Central	15	79	12.3
Taconic Mountains	15	94	12.3
Eastern Foothills	23	96	19.0

Northeast Highlands and North Central regions) detection was limited to 23% of the priority blocks. Two major factors seem to lead to the exclusion of the species from an area: low average temperatures early in the breeding cycle, and heavy forest cover. Kendeigh (1963) proposed that the onset of egg laying is limited by a temperature threshold of 14.8° C (58.5° F); the growing season in the Northeast Kingdom lasts fewer than 120 days, and late frosts in spring are common. Kendeigh (1963) allowed that some hardy individuals may be able to lay at temperatures ranging as low as 5° C (41° F), which may in part explain the presence of isolated pairs within the region of scarcity.

The House Wren's history in New England has apparently been one of decline and recovery. The introduction of the House Sparrow, followed by its explosive population increase, seemed to contribute to a widely perceived, precipitous decline in the House Wren population in the 1880s. Forbush (1929) and Ross (1953) chronicled the recovery of the species.

WALTER G. ELLISON