

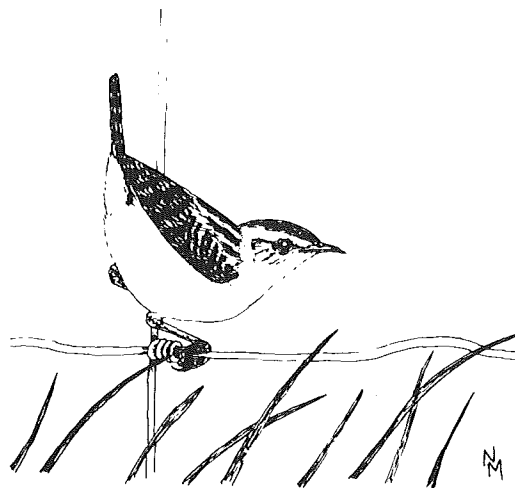
## Sedge Wren

*Cistothorus platensis*

To judge from available reports, the diminutive Sedge Wren (formerly called the Short-billed Marsh Wren) is one of the rarest regularly breeding species in Vermont. It has been proposed for Threatened Species status in the state. Possible breeders were found by Atlas Project workers at only nine locations, and nesting was confirmed at only two of these. The species' apparent scarcity may result from a variety of environmental and behavioral factors. The Sedge Wren is a shy bird with an insectlike song; it nests late in the summer in moist grassy and sedge habitats that are only nominally interesting to many birders. Colonies of Sedge Wrens have little nest-site tenacity from year to year (Burns 1982); areas searched unsuccessfully during one year may have been occupied in other years when efforts were directed elsewhere.

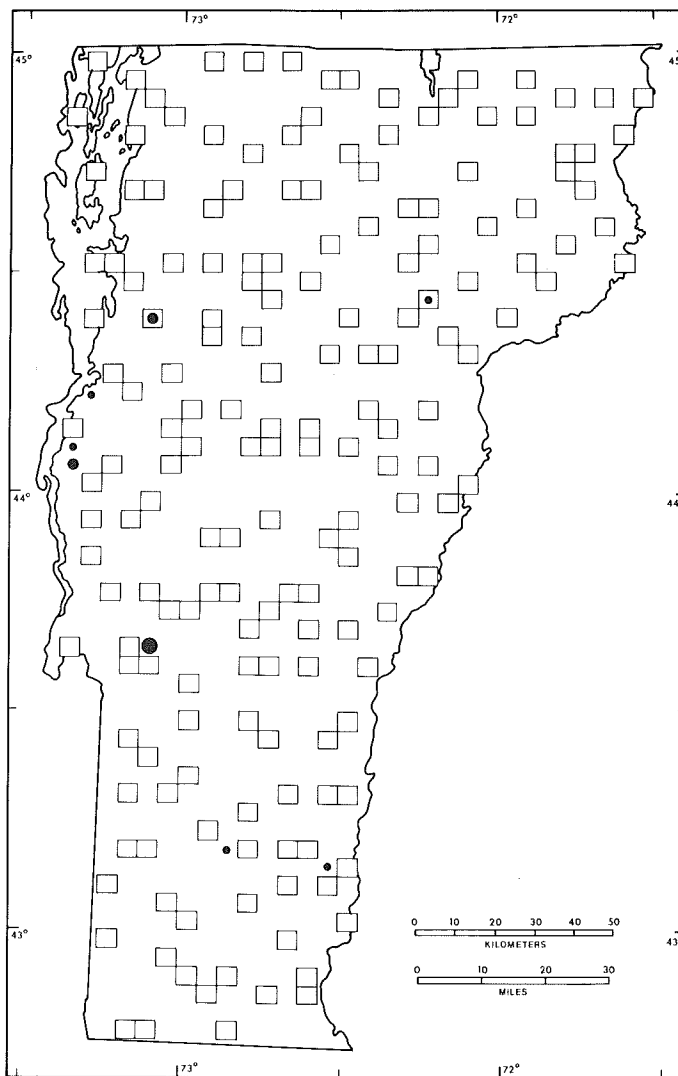
Vermont lies near the northeastern edge of the Sedge Wren's breeding range. Although clear-cutting in the 1800s created vast expanses of grassland in the state, intensive pasturing of sheep and other livestock at that time probably rendered these grasslands inhospitable to the wrens, as they prefer dense lush grasses and sedges in which to conceal their nests. Allen (1909) considered the species a rare breeder in New England and cited no records for Vermont. Forbush (1925) considered it a rare breeder in the state. Acres of seemingly suitable nesting habitat now exist in the Champlain Lowlands and at scattered locations in other regions, although grazing and mowing may make many potential sites unacceptable. Undiscovered colonies of Sedge Wrens could occur along the fringes of the marshes around Lake Champlain. Yet the Sedge Wren remains remarkably scarce in Vermont, and given existing agricultural practices its population is unlikely to increase significantly.

Sedge Wrens display extremely interesting breeding strategies. Although some males may appear in Vermont as early as the third week of May, the majority of the birds prob-



ably arrive and commence actual breeding much later, perhaps as late as July. Males establish and vigorously defend relatively large all-purpose territories of 0.2 ha (0.4 a), in which they build a series of 7 to 13 spherical, dummy nests over a period of 2 to 3 months (Burns 1982). The female selects a nest and lines it with grass, sedge, and feathers over a period of 3 days; the 7-egg clutch is then initiated and added to daily. A 14-day incubation period starts before completion of the clutch; hatching therefore extends over a 2- to 3-day period. The nestling period lasts about 2 weeks.

A quarter or more of the males are polygynous, and many of the primary (first-nesting) females raise second clutches, thus continuing the nesting cycle well into August. Because males are busy courting new females, constructing nests, and defending territories, the female gets little assistance during the nesting cycle. She is solely responsible for lining the nest and for incubating the eggs; in addition, she does most of the feeding of the young. Despite the male's inattention, nesting success is relatively high (Crawford 1977; Burns 1982), presumably because the nest is covered and difficult to locate. Nothing is known about postfledgling dependency or dispersal of the young. Because of this wren's apparent scarcity and its habit of skulking, its fall departure dates are largely speculative; no sightings have been made after early September.



**No. of priority blocks in which recorded**

TOTAL 2 (1%)

Possible breeding: 1 (50% of total)

Probable breeding: 1 (50% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 0 (0% of total)

**Physiographic regions in which recorded**

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	1	3	50
Green Mountains	0	0	0
North Central	1	5	50
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

Colonies of nesting Sedge Wrens are highly mobile between seasons. Influx and egress of the birds at the active colony may occur throughout the nesting season (Burns 1982). This flux may reflect intercolonial movement or the colonization of new areas that have become more acceptable as water levels recede or vegetative growth increases. Cues that trigger movement from one acceptable nesting area to another are unknown. Mowing caused one colony in southeastern Vermont to vacate, but the subsequent fate of the colony is unknown.

Those fortunate enough to have flushed a Sedge Wren from its marshy retreat can attest to its feeble flying powers. Rarely can

the bird be induced to fly more than once after being flushed; it prefers instead to evade pursuers on the ground. Nonetheless, Sedge Wrens annually migrate to and from their wintering grounds, which range along the Gulf Coast as far north as New Jersey. Southern populations apparently reside year-round at their breeding areas, playing host to an influx of northern birds each winter.

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