

Winter Wren

Troglodytes troglodytes

This tiny brown bird inhabits damp coniferous and mixed woodlands over much of Vermont. The Winter Wren is distributed over nearly the full range of elevations in Vermont, from the treeline on Mt. Mansfield at 1,220 m (4,000 ft) to the Alburg Black Spruce Bog at 30 m (98 ft). Habitats include subalpine forests, overgrown rock slides, cool ravines, bogs, white cedar swamps, and the edges of clear cuts at high elevations. Dead wood in the form of slash, downed trees, or standing skeletal trees seems to be a requirement, as it provides nest sites, perches, and foraging sites.

Despite their name, Winter Wrens are usually not hardy enough to weather Vermont winters. Most migrants arrive from early to mid April, although March arrivals are not unusual. Most males have established territories by early May. Because of its diminutive size, cryptic plumage, and habit of skulking, the Winter Wren is often difficult to see; in addition, its chosen haunts are fairly inaccessible. By far the best clue to the bird's presence is its strikingly loud, complex song. The song is a high-pitched torrential outpouring of clear whistled and trilled notes. The singing behavior of males is complex; most possess at least two discrete song types, sometimes three (Kroodsma 1980).

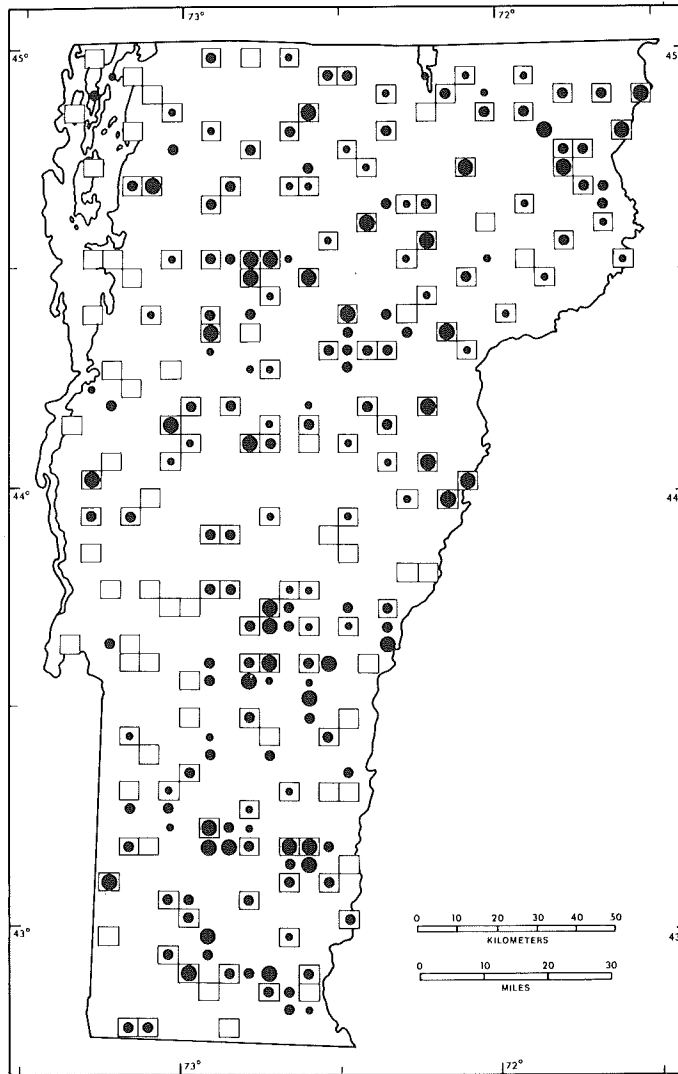
The nest is usually placed in a cavity in the overturned roots of a fallen tree. Nests are also located in cut-banks, standing hollow trees, deteriorated stumps, mossy hummocks, or even among moss covered talus. Considerable care is required to discover the well-hidden structure of moss, twigs, herb stems, and rootlets lined with feathers or hair. Fewer than 10% of Atlas Project confirmations for this species involved the discovery of an active nest. Because the parents themselves are difficult to see and are wary while young are still in the nest, food-carrying provided only 28% of the confirmed breedings. The young, which often number up to six, are noisy when fledged; family groups composed of parents and beg-



ging, recently fledged young provided 62% of the confirmations in Vermont.

Adults have been flushed from presumed nest sites as early as May 21 (Ross 1907). For Vermont, there are three documented egg dates reported, ranging from May 24 to June 14. Clutch sizes range from 4 to 7 eggs; the average is 5 or 6 eggs. The one date for a nest with young that has been reported is June 16. Eight dates for recently fledged young range from June 18 to July 11. Autumn migration commences in late September and peaks in October.

As have other forest birds, the Winter Wren has expanded its distribution and probably increased in numbers in Vermont over the last century as the state has regained its forest cover. However, the basic outlines of its range in the state have changed little since 1929, when Forbush stated that it was a "common summer resident in the mountains; rare in swamps in the valleys." Winter Wrens occurred in 91% of the priority blocks in the Green Mountains and 94% of the priority blocks in the Northeast Highlands—both cool, heavily forested regions with high elevations. The species is also well represented in the North and East Central regions. Winter Wrens are least common in the Champlain Lowlands and Taconic Mountains, and were found in fewer than 60% of the priority blocks in the Eastern Foothills, where they were noticeably absent from the southern Connecticut River



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 128 (72%)

Possible breeding: 41 (32% of total)
 Probable breeding: 58 (45% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 29 (23% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	13	42	10
Green Mountains	49	91	38
North Central	16	84	13
Northeast Highlands	15	94	12
East Central	17	89	13
Taconic Mountains	4	25	3
Eastern Foothills	14	58	11

valley. In western Vermont the species is rare in areas above the 20° C (68° F) isotherm—a fact that reflects the general absence of boreal conditions within this warmer area. In eastern Vermont, where a rougher landscape promotes an array of favorable local conditions for the species, Winter Wrens are more generally distributed. The species suffered a noticeable decline in Vermont after the winter of 1976–77, which was particularly harsh in the southeastern U.S. where the birds winter (Howe 1978; BBS 1966–79).

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