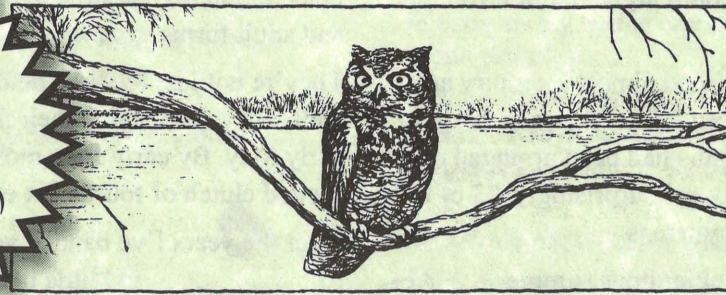


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER

BIRD CHECKLIST
INSIDE!
(FOLD IN THIRDS)



©SPRING 2014

WREN IN DOUBT

-- Mark Spreyer

*Wren is singing in the wet bush.
His song sings him, every feather is a tongue
He is a song-ball of tongues--
The head squatted back, the pin-beak stretching to
swallow the sky*

--from *The Unknown Wren* by Ted Hughes

Vocal Wrenditions

It is hard to believe that such a small bird can project such a loud and complicated call, a call which defies phonetic description.

Decades ago, A. Saunders wrote that most male wren songs consist of "a series of very rapid notes, the pitch rising at the beginning, falling towards the end, with a sudden increase in loudness on the highest notes in the middle of the song."

The songs usually last from 1.5 to 2.5 seconds but that's just the beginning. In the spring, from the time he migrates back to the nesting territory until the eggs hatch, the male wren repeats his song 100 to 600 times per hour every morning. He's one busy little vocalist.

For many folks the excited wren's call means spring is in full swing.

Renowned ornithologist Frank

Chapman wrote, "The bubbling music which springs so uncontrollably from his quivering throat is too characteristic a part of the season's chorus...."

What amazes me is that this "song-ball of tongues" is able to keep singing while he is busy building not just one but many nests!

Nest Box For Wrent

House wrens will build their nests in almost any enclosed space. A partial list of nesting sites includes: nest boxes (see *Programs*), mailboxes, flowerpots, drainpipes, hats, cans, teapots, folded awnings, old boots, fish creels, parked cars, and in the pockets of pants hung out to dry.

Writing about the house wren is a bit daunting. So much information is available about one of this country's best-known and most thoroughly studied songbirds, it is hard to decide what to include. Let's just get to it.

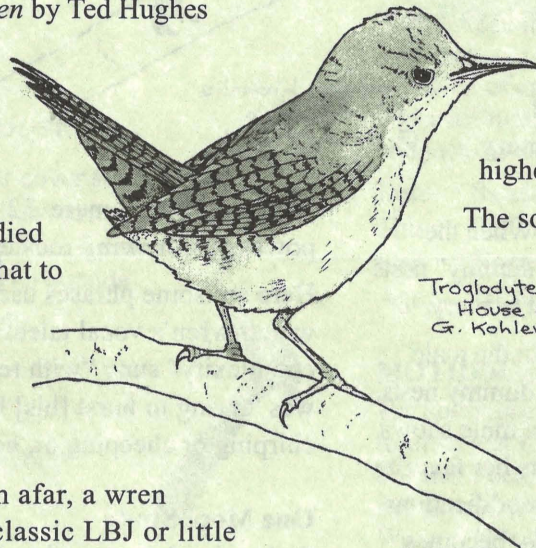
Wren Wreview

This diminutive bird is only 4.75 inches from stem to stern with a six-inch wingspan. From afar, a wren is uniformly brownish gray, a classic LBJ or little brown jobbie.

Upon closer examination, you'll note that the throat and chest are light gray while the head and back are a consistent shade of brown.

A wren's most distinguishing characteristic is its tail. It is finely barred in black and almost always cocked upward at a nearly ninety-degree angle to the bird's back.

The house wren has a very descriptive scientific name, *Troglodytes aedon*. Translated these two words mean "cave-dwelling nightingale" which is very fitting for a loquacious species that nests in cavities.



Troglodytes aedon
House wren
G. Kohler 2014

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • BARRINGTON • IL • 60010 • 847-428-OWLS (6957)

Wrens also use natural cavities such as old woodpecker holes, rock crevices, and...cow skulls. Yes, the cows were dead and I suppose one could argue about how natural their availability was.

According to the account, published almost a century ago, two dozen bovine skulls had been left to bleach in the sun on an island in Virginia. The skulls had been arranged on tree branches and shrubs and so, not surprisingly, 23 of the 24 skulls were soon occupied by wrens.

Given that the house wren is a ubiquitous summer resident in suburbs, city parks, farmyards, and college campuses, there has been a plethora of wren nesting studies.

For example, natural cavity nests in one Arizona study averaged slightly less than thirty feet in height while in Iowa the average height approached eighteen feet.

Another research paper indicates that wrens don't care if a nest box faces north or south. They'll use boxes facing either way.

Two studies found that house wrens prefer nest boxes with old nests in them. So much for cleaning the nest box out each spring!

Let's talk about the nest or, should I say, nests. When the males return, they can build six or so extra or "dummy" nests in every available cavity in their half-acre sized territory.

Wren nests are largely composed of sticks with the male adding over 400 or as little as 10 sticks to his dummy nests. These extra nests are model homes which the male shows to the discriminating female. Once she selects her favorite model and pairs with her mate, further nest modifications, such as lining the nest cup with soft materials, becomes her responsibility.

Nest Wrenovations

Speaking of softer materials, wrens have been known to use paper wasp nests, particularly ones attached to buildings. The wrens will hollow them out first before adding their own nesting materials. Wasps have returned the favor by building nests in and around nest boxes.

In other wasp news, mud daubers build tubular nests of mud for their young. They will paralyze spiders and stuff them in the tubes for their grubs to feed on.

I bet you can guess who has figured out how to use their narrow beaks to extract these tasty eight-legged treats. It must be like going to the frig to see what you can warm up for dinner.

Other invertebrates eaten by wrens include grasshoppers, leafhoppers, beetles, caterpillars, crickets, earwigs, snails, and ticks. In many cases, the wrens are dining on both the larval and adult forms of insects.

They're not just feeding themselves but hungry nestlings as well. They start laying their first clutch of six to eight eggs in early May. By early July, most wren pairs will be working on a second clutch of four to six eggs.

Over the years I've banded young wrens and they put the little in "little brown jobbie."



Troglodytes hiemalis
Winter wren
G. Kohler 2014

Winter Wrendezvous

There are other wren species to be seen in our area, such as marsh and sedge wrens, but I want to mention the tiniest representative of the clan, the winter wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*).

I was reminded of this little squirt when we banded one here last April (see *Programs*). It looks like a house wren but it is only four inches long.

The winter wren is legendary for its exquisite and powerful song.

Weighing in at a mere .32 ounces, it has ten times the sound power of a crowing rooster.

Here are some phrases used by others to underscore the winter wren's vocal talents. He achieves a "pinnacle of song complexity" sung "with remarkable vehemence" as if the bird was "trying to burst [his] lungs." No, we're not talking about chirping or cheeping or, heaven forbid, tweeting.

One More Study

As I said at the outset, there's an abundance of information available on wrens but one nesting question remains unanswered.

When nesting in a cow skull, do they prefer the left or right eye-socket? Just wondering.

PROGRAMS

Program Basics: PLEASE CALL 847-428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@wildblue.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than five people have called two days prior to a program, the activity could be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

THURSDAY TREKKERS

Join us outside for a healthy hour-long walk around a lake, through the woods, and who knows where else? Why not add Stillman to your list of exercise options? Come prepared to hike the trails with sturdy boots.

Dates: Thursdays: March 6, April 3, May 1, June 5
Time: 9:30 AM
Fee: None

EVENING WOODCOCK WATCHES

In past years, the woodcocks have put on quite a show. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate and we'll have another good nuptial display this year. Bring your binoculars and come join the fun!

Date: Saturday, March 15
Friday, March 21
Time: 6:30 PM
Fee: None
Age: 10 years and up

BUILD YOUR OWN BIRD HOUSE

Want to attract the wrens from our cover story to your yard? Join Jim Kaltsas and Peter Schwarz as they help you assemble your own wren box. Feel free to drop in between the times listed. Dress to be outside and *please bring your own hammer*.

Date: Sunday, March 30
Time: 1:00 - 3:00 PM
Member's Fee: \$5.00/house kit
Non-member's Fee: \$10.00/house kit
Limit: 1 house/family

BIRD BANDING

Watch Mark Spreyer, a licensed bird bander, measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Birds are not caught in a predictable manner, so come prepared to hike the trails. With luck, you'll see a bird in the hand and two in the bush. If it is raining, the banding open house will be cancelled.

Date: Sundays, April 6, May 4
Time: 9:00 AM to Noon
Fee: None

FRIDAY NIGHT CAMPFIRE

Join us for stories and roasted marshmallows. Enjoy the night sounds of early spring by the crackling warmth of the campfire.

Date: Friday, April 25
Time: 7:30-8:30 PM
Suggested Donation: \$2.00



SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Migration will be under way and you never know what we might find. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. *Please call 847-428-OWLS to make reservations.*

Date: Sundays, April 27 & May 18
Time: 8:00 AM
Fee: None
Age: 8 years and up

WILDFLOWER WALKS

Join us as we explore Stillman's woodlands in search of ephemeral beauties such as white trillium, may-apple, Virginia bluebell and jack-in-the-pulpit. Bring your camera!

Date: Sundays, April 27 & May 4
Time: 2:00 PM
Fee: None
Age: 10 years and up



MOTHER'S DAY with BIRDS OF PREY!

Try something different this Mother's Day. Bring Mom to meet our birds of prey. She'll love meeting the great horned, barn, barred, and screech owls plus a peregrine falcon, red-shouldered and broad-winged hawks.

We will bring the birds out so they can be seen up close.

Kids will have a chance to dissect owl pellets. Bring your mom, grandma, a camera, and a friend!

Drop by anytime between 1:00 and 3:00PM.

Date: Sunday, May 11
Time: 1:00-3:00 PM
Fee: \$10/car



Stillman Nature Center is available during the week, by reservation, to school classes and adult groups. You can visit the Center or we can bring our raptors to your meeting place. For more information about the group programs and fees, either call (847) 428-OWLS(6957), check our website: stillmannnc.org, or email us at: stillnc@wildblue.net

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER
BOARD MEMBERS

Susan Allman, President • Jim Kaltsas, Vice President • Mike Levin, Treasurer
Sue Kowall, Secretary • Eva Combs, Legal Advisor • Joy Sweet • Karen Lund
Nat Bilsky • Yvette James • Kristi Overgaard • Doug Saylor

Mark Spreyer, Director & Newsletter Editor
Gillian Kohler, Newsletter Illustrator
Meg Ewen, Webmaster

If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.

Yes, I'd like to become or continue as a member of the Stillman Nature Center.

You can also join online, just visit stillmannc.org and click on "Become a Member or Volunteer." Volunteer opportunities include teaching classes, clearing trails, and fundraising.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Please mail with your check to:

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER, 33 West Penny Road, South Barrington, IL 60010-9578

Barred Owl	\$1000.00
Peregrine Falcon	500.00
Barn Owl	250.00
Great Horned Owl	100.00
Broad-winged Hawk	50.00
Screech Owl	30.00
Student/Senior	15.00
Other	_____

Thank you for your donation.



Website: www.stillmannc.org

Email: stillnc@wildblue.net

(847) 428-OWIS

33 W. Penny Rd., S. Barrington, IL 60010

STILLMAN
NATURE CENTER



OPEN SUNDAYS 9AM - 4PM

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
BARRINGTON, IL 60010
PERMIT 112