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12-1987

## Early Fall Migration of Sedge Wrens

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Bedell, Paul A., "Early Fall Migration of Sedge Wrens" (1987). *Nebraska Bird Review*. 261.

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#### EARLY FALL MIGRATION OF SEDGE WRENS

Johnsgard (1980) lists the Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*) as an uncommon spring and fall migrant in eastern Nebraska, and a rare summer resident in eastern Nebraska, mostly east of a line from Knox to Gage counties. Half of the initial spring records occur between 1 and 12 May, with the latest 3 June. Half of the final fall records occur between 11 Sept. and 9 Oct., with the earliest 29 July. This paper presents observations of Sedge Wrens during 1987 in southcentral Nebraska, west of the line.

I found Sedge Wrens to be locally common in grassy or marshy areas from late July through at least mid-August, 1987. I recorded Sedge Wrens

in Clay, Hall, and Hamilton counties (Table 1). All Wrens counted were singing. Many were unseen because of their reclusive habits, but I saw about half of them either singing from an exposed position near the top of the vegetation or by "swishing" them.

The birds at the Taylor Ranch, in northwestern Hall Co., were in a complex of dry short-grass prairie mixed with low spots that had tall (4 to 5 ft.) marsh vegetation. These low spots had dried up earlier in the summer. The Wrens were using the tall vegetation. After finding the 4 birds on 28 July I returned the next day to look for evidence of nesting. I looked for a couple of hours and saw no evidence of anything other than the presence of singing birds, but a more thorough search did reveal at least 12 Sedge Wrens. No Marsh Wrens were using this area.

The 11 birds counted in the Clay Co. rainwater basin (US Fish and Wildlife Service survey #157) were using a short (about 12 inches high) grassy area, with about an inch of standing water. The large count of birds at Harvard Marsh was in the bluestem prairie to the east and northeast of the wetlands. Due to intermittent rain, I counted only along the road. A large area of similar habitat in the interior and southeast went uncounted. There is a similar report of about 14 Sedge Wrens in a bluestem pasture 11 to 25 August, 1986 from Washington Co., Oklahoma (Williams, 1987).

I have an additional record from Mormon Island on 1 August 1985, with Gary Lingle, when I recorded 5 Sedge Wrens. These birds were not present earlier in the summer (G. Lingle, pers. comm.). The first record of Sedge Wrens on Mormon Island wasn't until 1984, when 2 were reported on 28 June and again on 3 July (Labeledz 1984).

I examined *NBR* volumes 46 (1978) through 55 (to September 1987) and noticed a couple of trends. The Sedge Wren is noted fairly regularly in the fall occurrence report as early as late July and early August in eastern counties. Also, it is reported more often in fall than in spring. I counted 38 fall sightings from 10 reports and only 13 spring sightings from 9 reports. Many of the spring sightings were from Lancaster Co., where it was reported in the 1982 nesting survey. This contrasts to Johnsgard (1980), which lists somewhat more spring than fall records.

Whether these birds were migrants or indicate a breeding population is not known. Sedge Wrens apparently have an unusual breeding strategy that includes a nesting cycle which can begin as late as August. Johnsgard (1979) says that the few Kansas records indicate that eggs are laid in July and August at that latitude. Walkinshaw (1935) says that nesting occurs in Michigan any month from May until September. Meanly (1952) found eggs and young during the first two weeks of September in Arkansas. Additionally, there is a report of an active nest in northeastern Kansas, in Atchinson Co., on 10 August 1980 (Williams 1981). This aspect of their breeding strategy apparently has not been studied, but is discussed by Burns (1982) and Kroodsma and Verner (1978).

I was prompted to write this note because Sedge Wrens seem to be a relatively obscure species not commented upon in *NBR*, I was surprised at how many of them I saw. For other readers of the *NBR* perhaps an awareness of their potential mid-summere breeding in the state could lead to a clearer picture of their status in Nebraska.

I wish to thank my wife, Susan, for her help, and Gary Lingle for reviewing this manuscript.

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Table 1. Distribution of Sedge Wren Sightings

| Date | Location                            | Number of Wrens |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 7/28 | Taylor Ranch, Hall Co.              | 4               |
| 7/29 | Taylor Ranch, Hall Co.              | 12              |
| 8/2  | Pintail Wildlife Area, Hamilton Co. | 1               |
| 8/12 | Pintail Wildlife Area, Hamilton Co. | 1               |
| 8/16 | Rainwater Basin #157, Clay Co.      | 11              |
| 8/17 | Harvard Marsh, Clay Co.             | 26              |
| 8/20 | Mormon Island, Hall Co.             | 5               |

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