

NOTE ON BEWICK'S WRENS

Robert R. Reid, Jr.

Observers have widely noted the extreme reduction in population of Bewick's Wren in Alabama over the past decade or more; and, in fact, its reduction in numbers has been a cause of concern throughout the East. (See the "Blue List," American Birds (1975), 29(6):1067-72.) For example, this wren was formerly seen on virtually all counts in the Birmingham area; but now its presence in Alabama has been severely restricted although for the last three Christmas Seasons totals of 5-6 were reported on the AOS Christmas Counts. In 1976, however, the writer found 3 birds in northern Choctaw County on June 6 while running the Choctaw-Sumter Breeding Bird Survey of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and later on July 10-11 two were discovered at a farm just south of Union Springs in Bullock County. Earlier in the year on March 28, a pair were found on so-called Red-cockaded Hill at Lake Purdy near Birmingham and were located again on July 25, with another being found on that date at the backwaters of Cox's Creek, principal tributary of that lake.

In addition, last year on July 6, while running a county bird survey in Marshall County, one was located in mountainous areas near Arab, then the only breeding season record since 1960 for the eastern half of the Tennessee Valley (see Imhof, Thomas A., "The Season, Summer-Fall, 1975," Alabama Birdlife (1975), 23(3-4):12). Further, in DeKalb County, a pair were found near Ft. Payne on May 16 of this year on the Lookout Mountain Spring Count. The number of these observations lends some encouragement to the thought that perhaps this species is making a come-back.

Bewick's Wren appears to respond well to Screech Owl tapes, which is a good help in discovering it since among its preferred habitats are brush piles and thickets, the pair found on Red-cockaded Hill this summer being in a thick growth of blooming bicolor lespedeza in an area with a number of fallen logs. Although the Choctaw and Bullock County observations were made without the aid of recorders, all of the others were.

The bird has a beautiful song resembling that of the Song Sparrow (see Imhof, Alabama Birds (1962):388). However, it is more often than not giving only call notes, which, while they do resemble the similar Carolina Wren, are different. Imhof describes them as a buzzing call of scolding quality. To the writer, they appear less varied and more nasal than the Carolina--perhaps appropriately being described as a cross between the Carolina and a Brown-headed Nuthatch.

As noted in all the guides, one of the conspicuous field marks is the white eye-line, but that is also present in the similar Carolina Wren. While the guides also note the white longitudinal spotting of the tail, the spots are not always visible unless the bird spreads its tail (see Bent, Arthur Cleveland, Life Histories of North American Birds, Bull. No. 195, U. S. Nat'l Museum (1948):176; Peterson, Roger Tory, A Field Guide to the Birds (1934), 2d Ed.:122). Therefore, the marks that one must look for to distinguish Bewick's from the Carolina Wren are its dark brown back contrasted with white underparts as opposed to the Carolina's russet brown back and buffy belly. Bewick's has a longer tail; consequently, the Carolina gives the picture of being a "chunkier" bird. Another feature of interest is that, while young Carolinas have lighter underparts than their parents, the young Bewick's has grayish or dusky tinges or marks on the breast (see Bent, supra:179). The writer has noted this on several of the summer observations, and the grayish marks appear rather clearly.

The above observations in Choctaw and DeKalb Counties were also by my wife Elberta and that in Bullock also by her and Lynn and Fritz Woehle.

It is certainly hoped that such a beneficial bird and beautiful songster as the Bewick's Wren will return to its former numbers in the Southeast, so observers might be on the watch in hopes of finding more evidence of its presence.

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BANDER'S CORNER

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Banding this winter provided its usual share of interesting records. I banded my first Evening Grosbeaks this year at the home of Bob and Elberta Reid. These birds are always a pleasure to be around and help to brighten any winter's day. While at the Reid's, I also captured a Carolina Chickadee which was already wearing a band. I reported the band number and discovered that this bird had been banded seven years earlier by my friend and a former president of AOS, Michael Lee Bierly.

Other interesting birds banded this winter include a Grasshopper Sparrow at Courtland (winter records from the Tenn. Valley for this species are scarce) and White-crowned Sparrows at Courtland, Ballplay and Lakeland Farm.

This spring came complete with the usual excitement of returning summer birds, especially warblers. One of my most outstanding memories this year was provided by the White-eyed Vireo when Tom Imhof and I banded a combined total of over 100 on April 7 at Fort Morgan. (For other totals see the Season column in this issue.)

An interesting recovery of a Barn Swallow I banded occurred last spring. It would seem that a young man from Huntsville, Mr. Charles Droost, was following the progress of a Barred Owl nest when he discovered the tail-feathers and a leg of a bird in the nest. The leg had a band which he reported to the Fish and Wildlife Service. This band was placed by me on a Barn Swallow at Town Creek, Alabama--nearly 100 miles west of the Owl nest. I suppose we shall never know how a relatively agile, diurnal bird became food for the slow, nocturnal owl, but it probably reflects one of the many hazards of annual migration.

Here is an interesting series of recaptures I thought you might enjoy:
Catbird Band #821-34845 - banded by Peavy on 10-24-73
(All captures at Fort Morgan)

caught by Imhof on 11-06-74
caught by Peavy on 04-06-75
caught by Imhof on 04-25-75
caught by Peavy on 04-04-76
caught by Imhof on 04-09-76

Nothing like taking turns, is there?

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