

## ABOUT THE COVER: Marsh Wren

The Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) has a plain dark brown crown, a bold white eye line, and a black triangle on the upper back that is streaked with white. The flanks are buffy, and the undertail coverts may be white or buffy. Rarely, however, does one have the opportunity to linger over a Marsh Wren's field marks, for the bird is secretive and may only present itself while singing or to investigate a good "pish" or "squeak."

In New England, Marsh Wrens are locally common summer residents in the reeds and cattails of either freshwater or brackish marshes. When the males arrive on territory, usually before mid-May, they exhibit an interesting behavior. They build as many as six or more extra or dummy nests before and after the arrival of the females. These nests are often abandoned before they reach completion, and there is little evidence that they are ever used as brood nests, sleeping places, or territorial markers. The brood nest is built almost entirely by the female. According to the account in A. C. Bent's life history series, the reason for these extra nests is not clear, but a plausible interpretation seems to be that the construction gives the birds an outlet for their superabundant energy during the period of sexual activity. The nest-building almost always ceases soon after the females arrive and mating takes place.

Melodically, the Marsh Wren's song does not rank high. It is a vigorous cacophony of sound that bubbles, gurgles, rattles, and trills, impossible to ignore. This lively noise emanates from the marsh both day and night during the breeding season and has produced descriptions that run the gamut from tuning a violin to the noise of a wind-up mechanical toy.

J. B. Hallett, Jr.

## MEET OUR COVER ARTIST

**GORDON MORRISON**, who generously permitted *Bird Observer* to use his painting *Bobwhite Quail* on the February 1988 cover, has allowed us to print another of his works, *Oven Nester*, on the cover of this issue, a painting that is available for sale. Gordon's work is to be found in art galleries and collections in a number of states. He accepts commissioned work at his home studio at 52 Bulfinch Street, North Attleboro, MA 02760.

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ADDENDUM to "Courtship Display and Territorial Defense by Yellow-breasted Chat" by William E. Davis, Jr. in *Bird Observer* (December 1987) 15: 289-290.

After this article was in press, the author discovered a reference by Val Nolan, Jr. (*The Ecology and Behavior of the Prairie Warbler Dendroica discolor*, A.O.U. Monograph no. 26, Lawrence, Kansas: Allen Press, 1978) that was relevant. In a section titled "Aerial Displays and Acts," Nolan describes the use of undulating flight, i.e., butterfly and moth flights, by Prairie Warbler "agonistically (sometimes sexually) motivated males." The butterfly flight was described as "butterfly like wing beats somewhat resembling the stiff beats seen in the display flight of the Yellow-breasted Chat." The Prairie Warbler uses the butterfly flight in both territorial defense and courtship, just as the Yellow-breasted Chat apparently uses variations of its display flight for both.

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