

MOBILE HOME OF A CAROLINA WREN

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On 23 May 1989, we observed an unusual Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) nest in Columbus, Lowndes County, Mississippi. It had been built behind a headlight about eight inches from the radiator of a van and the bird reached the nest by entering through the grill (Figure 1).

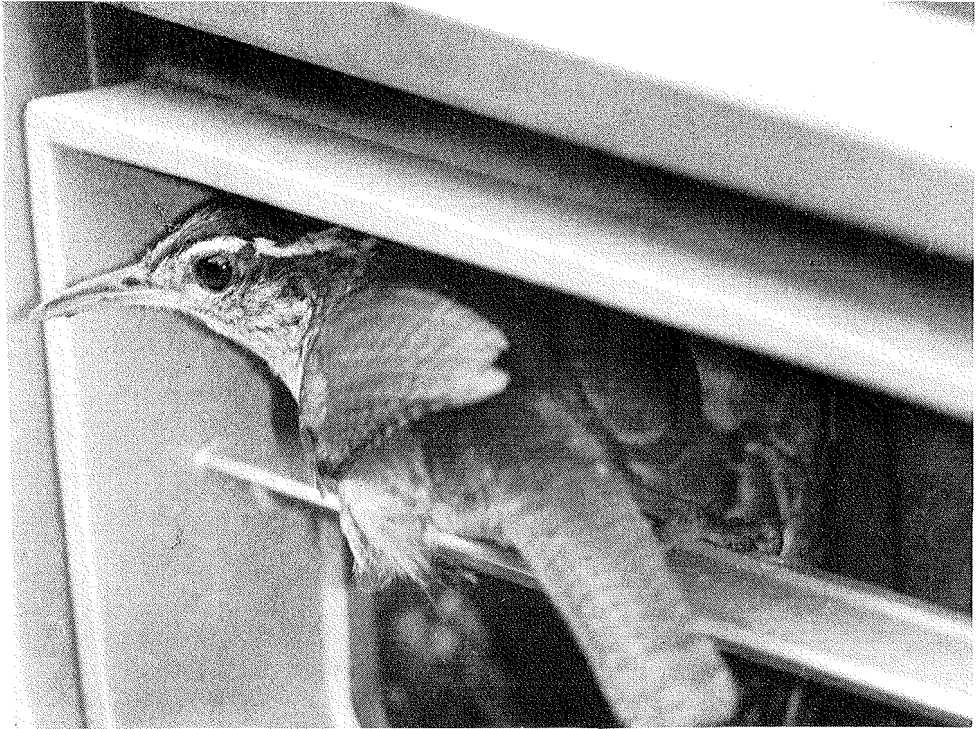


Figure 1. Carolina Wren at its nest in the engine compartment of a van.

The nest had been reported to us by the van's owner, David E. Jones, Sr. Mr. Jones had been hospitalized and his van had not been driven for several days. He first observed wrens entering the grill of his van on about 2 May and he left the van parked in his driveway during most of the nesting period. By 10 May the five eggs in the nest had hatched and the adults were feeding small nestlings. On that date Jones drove the van to a garage approximately two miles from his home and was gone for between an hour to an hour and a half before the van was returned to his driveway. On 13 May, Jones made another trip in the van, a distance of about 5 miles. On that trip the van was gone for about 2.5 hours. One nestling later fell from the nest and although Jones replaced it, it ultimately died and was removed from the nest by a parent. A second nestling subsequently died, and Jones observed the three remaining young fledge on the morning of 29 May.

A nestling period of at least 19 days is unusually long. Bent (1948) and Nice and Thomas (1948) give a nestling period of about two weeks. The death of two chicks and the extended nestling period may have resulted from reduced feeding by the parents during absences of the vehicle and human visits.

Although the Carolina Wren is considered a forest bird and "naturally" nests in tree crevices and in somewhat globular nests among dense vegetation (Bent 1948), it has readily adapted to nooks and crannies associated with human environments. These wrens are known to nest in old boots, shoe boxes, tissue boxes, and almost any conceivable man-made cavity. For Carolina Wrens to construct a nest behind the grill of a long-parked vehicle is somewhat in keeping with its known adaptations for coping in man's world. To continue the nesting effort when the van was moved and absent from the wrens' home range for 1-2.5 hours demonstrates a tenacity that is noteworthy. However, such a "mobile home" is not unprecedented for Carolina Wrens. Herbert L. Stoddard (in Bent 1948:208) reported an active nest in a tractor which was used on a daily basis. Stoddard (1978) also noted Carolina Wren nests "over noisy gasoline engines or water pumps." Another testament to the noise tolerance of these wrens was a nest in the back of a "nickelodeon" at which adults fed

nestlings while the music was playing "full blast" (Hopkins 1968).

An even more incredible mobile wren home was a Booneville, Missouri nest reported by Northcutt (1937). In that instance, a pair of wrens built a nest over the rear axle of a car which was driven 1210 miles during the nesting effort! Although these wrens were identified as House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*), we wonder if they too might not have been Carolina Wrens. In the published account of the nest, Northcutt refers "to one of the wrens as having "teakettled" to its mate. "Teakettle" is a common mnemonic device used to describe the call of the Carolina Wren and we would not at all associate it with the House Wren.

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