

# Twenty-fifth in the Fuertes print series

[The original painting by Louis Agassiz Fuertes was reproduced in *Bird-Lore*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, March-April 1917. The text accompanying the plate was written by Frank M. Chapman and was published in the same issue of *Bird-Lore*. The text is here reprinted with taxonomic and distributional updating. The scientific names, ranges, and habitat notes have been taken from the A.O.U. Check-list, 6th edition, 1983.]

## Notes on the Plumage of North American Birds

Frank M. Chapman

As Mr. W. DeW. Miller has remarked in discussing the plumage changes of the wrens figured in *Bird-Lore* for December, 1916, the sexes in this family are alike in color or essentially so. After the postjuvinal molt, the young bird is distinguishable from the adult only by slight differences in the wings and tail which are not renewed at that molt, and subsequent changes in the color of the plumage are due only to wear and fading. But if the wrens vary but little with age, sex, or season, many of the species vary geographically, and those which have a wide range are usually represented in it by a large number of local races or subspecies which, in their color and size, exhibit the effect of the existing environment.

**Bewick's Wren** (*Thryomanes bewicki* [now *Thryomanes bewickii*], Fig. 1).—The nestling (juvinal) plumage has the breast mottled or indefinitely spotted with blackish, but these markings are lost at the postjuvinal molt, after which the young bird resembles the adult.

Bewick's Wren is found throughout the greater part of the United States (although it is only locally common east of the Alleghanies), and is consequently subjected to a wide variety of conditions to which it responds by more or less evident racial variations in color and size.

Fortunately these wrens are as a rule non-migratory, and one therefore rarely finds two races in the same locality. Field identification, therefore, so far as subspecies is concerned, is more a matter of geography than of ornithology. So far as *species* is concerned, Bewick's Wren may be readily distinguished from the House Wren by its white or buffy superciliary line, by its longer tail, larger size and other characters. Our figure, based on the eastern race, is somewhat too rufous and the superciliary line is more buffy than is usual. The western races are grayer, less reddish brown above.

**House Wren** (*Troglodytes aedon*, Fig. 2).—The juvenal plumage differs from that of the adult in the blackish mottling of the breast, but, as with Bewick's Wren, these markings disappear with the postjuvinal molt. It also agrees with that species in having no spring molt, and the breeding plumage is essentially like that worn in winter.

The House Wren ranges from Cape Horn to southern and east-central British Columbia, northern Alberta, central Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, central Ontario, southwestern Quebec, Maine and New Brunswick. Several specific and many subspecific names are applied to it in this wide area, but one has only to see the birds and hear them sing, whether in South America or North America, to be convinced of their close relationship.



**Winter Wren** (*Nannus hiemalis* [now *Troglodytes troglodytes*], Fig. 3)—The nestling Winter Wren has the breast mottled or margined with dusky, and the presence of these markings in connection with the barrings on the flanks make the juvenal plumage quite unlike that of the adult. Only the flank markings are retained at the postjuvenal molt, after which young and old are alike in color. There is no spring molt, and the summer plumage is essentially like that of winter.

This species is resident in coniferous forests (especially spruce and fir), primarily with dense understory and within close proximity to water, and in open areas with low cover along rocky coasts, cliffs, islands or high mountainous areas, including moors and steppes; in migration and winter also in deciduous forests and woodland with dense understory, thickets, brushy fields, hedgerows, and in some gardens.

The Winter Wren ranges in North America from coastal southern and southeastern Alaska, northern British Columbia, northern Alberta, central Saskatchewan, central Manitoba, central Ontario and Quebec, southern Labrador and Newfoundland south to central California, northeastern Oregon, central Idaho, western Montana, southwestern Alberta, southeastern Manitoba, east-central Minnesota, southern Wisconsin, central Michigan, southern Ontario, north-central Ohio, in the Appalachians through eastern West Virginia, western Virginia, eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina to northeastern Georgia, and to northern Pennsylvania, northern New Jersey and southeastern New York.

**Alaska Wren** (*Nannus alascensis* [now *Troglodytes troglodytes alascensis*], Fig. 4).—The Alaska Winter Wren is a representative form of the Winter Wren in the Pribilof Islands (St. George Island, St. Paul Island and Otter Island). It is accidental at Point Barrow, Alaska.

The Alaska Winter Wren differs from the Winter Wren chiefly in having a slightly longer bill; below, it more nearly resembles the Western Winter Wren (*T.t. pacificus*) in color, while the upperparts are more like those of the Eastern Winter Wren (*T.t. hiemalis*).

**Long-billed Marsh Wren** (*Telmatodytes palustris* [now **Marsh Wren**, *Cistothorus palustris*], Fig. 5).—The nestling Long-billed Marsh Wren has the crown and foreback black without white streaks and is thus quite unlike the adult in appearance; but after the post-juvenal molt, old and young wear the same kind of plumage. In Dwight's opinion there is a complete prenuptial or spring molt in this species.

This species' favored habitat is fresh-water and brackish marshes in cat-tails, tule, bulrush and reeds.

This species is found in North America from southwestern and east-central British Columbia, northern Alberta, central Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, western and southern Ontario, northern Michigan, southwestern Quebec, southern Maine and eastern New Brunswick, south to southern California, northeastern Baja California, northwestern Sonora, southwestern Arizona, southern Nevada, south-central Utah, extreme northwestern New Mexico, extreme western and southern Texas, the Gulf Coast, and east-central Florida, generally very local in distribution in the interior of North America; also locally in the state of Mexico.

**Short-billed Marsh Wren** (*Cistothorus stellaris* [now **Sedge Wren**, *Cistothorus platensis*], Fig. 6).—I have seen no specimens of this species in nestling plumage. In the nestlings of *Cistothorus apolinari*, a species from the Andes of Colombia, the streaks of the upperparts are nearly obsolete. According to Dwight, the young of our species after the postjuvenal molt, cannot be distinguished from the adult, and there is a complete spring molt. There is only one species of Short-billed Marsh Wren in North America, but closely allied species are found as far south as Argentina.

The habitat preferences of this species include grasslands and savanna, especially where wet or boggy, and sedge marshes, in South America in dry grasslands, and locally in North America in dry, cultivated grain fields; in migration and winter also in brushy grasslands (Tropical to Paramo zones).

This species of wren breeds in North America from extreme east-central Alberta, central Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, western and southern Ontario, northern Michigan, extreme southwestern Quebec, central Maine and southern New Brunswick south to east-central Arkansas, southern Illinois, central Kentucky, west-central West Virginia and southeastern Virginia and west to central North Dakota, eastern South Dakota, eastern Nebraska, northeastern Colorado and eastern Kansas.