

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*



Folk Name: Mocking Wren, Change Bird

Status: Resident

Abundance: Very Common

Habitat: Woodlands, overgrown fields, field edges, residential areas

The Carolina Wren is one of our best known and most beloved birds. Most Carolinians know this perky resident wren when they see it and often, when they hear it as well. Its *tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle*, or *freedom, freedom, freedom* call, is a familiar part of everyday life around most homes and neighborhoods in this part of the South. In fact, the Carolina Wren was so popular in North and South Carolina that it was nominated to be State Bird in both states, and it actually won—twice in South Carolina.

In North Carolina, the Carolina Wren was a leading contender for State Bird designation in 1943. Several organizations recommended that it be selected to represent the state. Statesville pharmacist Maurice Stimson published an article in support of the Carolina Wren, writing:

The Carolina Wren, a reddish brown bird with buff colored breast and a distinct white line through the eye. The largest, handsomest, lightest in color most widely distributed best known and universally loved of all the Wren family to be found in North Carolina. A resident found in all sections of the State at all seasons of the year. His explosive energy, friendly disposition and cheerful spirit make him a most lovable character. ...His energetic ringing song is heard oftener and in more months of the year than the song of any other bird. I cast my vote for the Carolina Wren.

However, the Carolina Wren ultimately lost this race, and the Northern Cardinal was selected.

The Carolina Wren was first nominated and eventually selected as the State Bird of South Carolina in 1930. The effort was led by the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs and supported by Alexander Sprunt Jr. and several nature groups. It reigned as State Bird until 1939 when the state legislature, ignorant of the wren's unofficial status, formally adopted the mockingbird as the State Bird. The mockingbird was subsequently overthrown in 1948, and the Carolina Wren has represented the state of South Carolina ever since.

The Carolina Wren is one of our best studied birds with regard to nesting. It begins nesting in this region as early as February and often has a second brood that fledges by the end of July. Nests are often very easy to observe and



they provide an excellent way for children to learn about the nesting process. These birds are seldom frightened away when people are careful about observing their eggs and young.

Virtually every written summary of the Carolina Wren includes examples of the many unique locations where nests have been found. In essence, these birds will nest almost anywhere. Free-roaming cats and black rat snakes are possibly their biggest concern.

On May 3, 1928, William McIlwaine wrote: "A family of little Carolina wrens I saw on the Myers Park golf links. They were being watched most carefully by the parent birds and also by a moccasin [northern water] snake. Another family of little wrens is in the tool box in the garage of Dr. R. T. Ferguson on Granville Road."

Elizabeth Clarkson penned this brief account of a Carolina Wren nest failure in Charlotte in the spring of 1943. "We had intermittent cold all through April and May and it played havoc with my nestlings. The first set of Carolina wrens left the nest April 6th and we had ice that night and none survived, but the parents began rebuilding on the 8th in my honeysuckle vine of all things. That is the first time I have ever had them build in a vine." The following year, she found the wrens had built a nest in her neighbor's garage, but "the parents brought them over the wall into my garden to raise."

In March 1949, Mrs. Olin Griffith of Fort Mill, SC, wrote: "The wrens sing their freedom song as they hide their nests in the most unexpected places. A pair built in an old army helmet I hid in a breath o' spring bush."

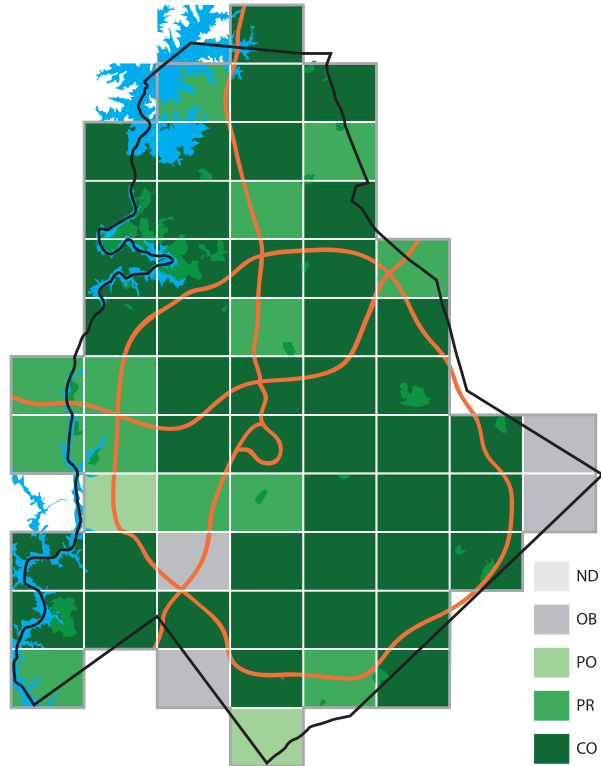
On April 1, 1953, Clarkson wrote "Their first babies of 1953 left the nest last week. March 26 was the first day we saw them."

Other nests in the Central Carolinas have been built in: a wreath on a front door, a coat pocket, a paper bag on a shelf, between books on a shelf, in the skull of a dead cow, a coffee pot, a tea kettle, an empty can, a hollow gourd, in flower pots galore, the corner of a ping pong table on a porch, inside an open bag of potting soil, and many, many more. One recent observation was of a pair building a

nest in a hole in the front bumper of a Honda CRV. The car was parked at 9:00 a.m. and the birds immediately began building their nest. The car was moved at lunch and returned, and the birds continued building the nest. The car was taken home for the night, returned the next day, and the birds immediately resumed their building. Finally, the owner had to tape over the hole before the female had a chance to lay her eggs—as incubation was going to be quite problematic.



Carolina Wren adult, and fledgling below.
(Gary P. Carter, Bill Archer)



Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas:
Nearly Ubiquitous (PR/13, CO/43)