

Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*



Folk Name: Short-billed Marsh Wren

Status: Migrant, Winter Visitor

Abundance: Rare

Habitat: Marshes, wet meadows, tall grass

The Sedge Wren and Marsh Wren are closely related species. Both are small birds that winter in dense marsh vegetation along the coast of the Carolinas. Both are so secretive in their daily activities that they are often very difficult to see, however, they can be quite noisy and may be easily heard. They both have black backs with white streaking that differentiate them from our other wrens. The Sedge Wren was once commonly known as the Short-billed Marsh Wren, as its bill is noticeably shorter than the Marsh Wren's bill. This tiny wren just makes the list of our top five smallest birds averaging a mere 4 ½ inches in length.

The Sedge Wren primarily nests in the central United States and Canada. Most winter in coastal regions from New Jersey to Texas and south into Mexico. This wren is usually reported during migration here in the Central Carolinas, but it is occasionally found lingering inland here during the winter months. We have records of this species in the region from every month except June, July, and August. Our latest spring departure date is 14 May, and our earliest fall arrival date is 11 September. This wren has been reported in the region almost annually since 2000, and it might be expected to pop up in any of our counties. Our peak count is seven birds tallied on the Southern Lake Norman CBC in 2005.

We have about two dozen records from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Leverett Loomis was the first to confirm this bird in our region. He collected one in Chester County on September 18, 1880. He found it "in a little depression along the side of a railroad embankment. ... [The spot,] about half an acre, becomes boggy during wet weather, and is grown over with marsh grass and scrubby willows." He later collected three additional specimens on: October 8 and 10, 1885, and October 5, 1888.

Sedge Wrens were reported on Christmas Bird Counts in Chester County in 1937 and Stanly County in 1954–1956, and 1961. H. Lee Jones found a Sedge Wren in Mecklenburg County on September 22, 1962, providing the first record for that county. Lois Goforth found a Sedge Wren on the Iredell Christmas Bird Count on December 29, 1974, and reported this bird was singing.

David Wright reported one in Gaston County on October 6, 1984, and another in York County on October 17, 1984. Flo Cobey sighted one while participating on the Charlotte Spring Bird Count on May 3, 1986. Participants conducting the Charlotte count found a Sedge Wren off



J F M A M J J A S O N D

Downs Road in Pineville on May 7, 1988. In 1989, a Sedge Wren spent much of the winter at Creech's Pond in York County from 16 January through 22 February. Taylor Piephoff found one in Mecklenburg County on April 29, 1990.

Kevin Hennings sighted one at the Carolina Sandhills NWR on March 21, 1992. One was reported on the Charlotte Christmas Bird Count in 1994. One was seen at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge on October 23, 1999. Two were tallied on the Pee Dee CBC in Anson County on December 16, 2000.

We have had about 40 reports in the region since the turn of the twenty-first century and almost half of



Sedge Wren at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge. (Jeff Lemons)

these were found in the winter months from December through February, although it is seldom reported in February. Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge has been the most dependable location for this species in the region.

A few twenty-first century reports of note are presented here. Taylor Piephoff reported one at a regular spot at Wallace Dairy farms on the Mecklenburg–Cabarrus county border on May 10, 2014. He noted it was “singing and gave leisurely views in response to play back. Wet field with blackberry thickets bordering marshy farm ponds.”

Martina Nordstrand photographed one at the Brandon Oaks Nature Path in Union County, NC, on September 30, 2015, and provided this description of her encounter: “Small, shortish-tailed wren with intricate mantle + nape pattern, buffy sides and breast, and eyestripe. Called a few times. Very skulky, hard to see, actions similar to a yellowthroat. Lost it in the brambles, but didn't see it fly anywhere.” Matt Janson reported a Sedge Wren “singing incessantly” at the observation platform at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge, on May 7, 2017.