THE HOUSE WREN.

+TROGLODYTES ÆDON, *Vieill.*

PLATE CXX.—MALE, FEMALE, AND YOUNG.

From whence the House Wren comes, or to what parts it retires during winter, is more than I have been able to ascertain. Although it is extremely abundant in the States of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, and Maryland, from the middle of April until the beginning of October, I have never been able to trace its motions, nor do I know of any naturalist in our own country, or indeed in any other, who has been more fortunate.

Its flight is short, generally low, and performed by a constant tremor of the wings, without any jerks of either the body or tail, although the latter is generally seen erect, unless when the bird is singing, when it is always depressed. When passing from one place to another, during the love-season, or whilst its mate is sitting, this sweet little bird flutters still more slowly through the air, singing all the while. It is sprightly, active, vigilant, and courageous. It delights in being near and about the gardens, orchards, and the habitations of man, and is frequently found in abundance in the very centre of our eastern cities, where many little boxes are put up against the walls of houses, or the trunks of trees, for its accommodation, as is also done in the country. In these it nestles and rears its young. It is seldom, however, at a loss for a breeding place, it being satisfied with any crevice or hole in the walls, the sill of a window, the eaves, the stable, the barn, or the upper side of a piece of timber, under the roof of a piazza. Now and then, its nest may be seen in the hollow branch of an apple tree. I knew of one in the pocket of an old broken-down carriage, and many in such an old hat as you see represented in the plate, the little creatures anxiously peeping out or hanging to the side of the hat, to meet their mother, who has just arrived with a spider, whilst the male is on the lookout, ready to interpose should any intruder come near. The same nest is often resorted to for several successive years, merely receiving a little mending.

The familiarity of the House Wren is extremely pleasing. In Pennsylvania a pair of these birds had formed a nest, and the female was sitting in a hole of the wall, within a few inches of my (literally so-called) drawing-room. The male was continually singing within a few feet of my wife and myself, whilst I was engaged in portraying birds of other species. When the

window was open, its company was extremely agreeable, as was its little song, which continually reminded us of its happy life. It would now and then dive into the garden at the foot of the window, procure food for its mate, return and creep into the hole where it had its nest, and be off again in a moment. Having procured some flies and spiders, I now and then threw some of them towards him, when he would seize them with great alacrity, eat some himself, and carry the rest to his mate. In this manner, it became daily more acquainted with us, entered the room, and once or twice sang whilst there. One morning I took it in to draw its portrait, and suddenly closing the window, easily caught it, held it in my hand, and finished its likeness, after which I restored it to liberty. This, however, made it more cautious, and it never again ventured within the window, although it sang and looked at us as at first.

The antipathy which the House Wren shews to cats is extreme. Although it does not attack puss, it follows and scolds her until she is out of sight. In the same manner, it makes war on the Martin, the Blue Bird and the House Swallow, the nest of any of which it does not scruple to appropriate to itself, whenever occasion offers. Its own nest is formed of dry crooked twigs, so interwoven as scarcely to admit entrance to any other bird. Within this outer frame-work grasses are arranged in a circular manner, and the whole is warmly lined with feathers and other equally soft materials. The eggs are five or six, of a regularly oval form, and uniform pale reddish colour. Two broods are raised in the season.

The male seems to delight in attempting to surpass in vocal powers others of his species, during the time of incubation; and is frequently seen within sight of another, straining his little throat, and gently turning his body from side to side, as if pivoted on the upper joints of his legs. For a moment he conceives the musical powers of his rival superior to his own, and darts towards him, when a battle ensues, which over, he immediately resumes his song, whether he has been the conqueror or not.

When the young issue from the nest, it is interesting to see them follow the parents amongst the currant bushes in the gardens, like so many mice, hopping from twig to twig, throwing their tail upwards, and putting their bodies into a hundred different positions, all studied from the parents, whilst the latter are heard scolding, even without cause, but as if to prevent the approach of enemies, so anxious are they for the safety of their progeny. They leave Pennsylvania about the 1st of October.

This species is not found farther eastward along our Atlantic shores than the province of Nova Scotia, where it is not very common, and I suspect that the specimen of a *Troglodytes* procured by Mr. DRUMMOND at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, and described in the Fauna Boreali-Americana,

was the Wood Wren, *T. Americanus*, it being found from Maine to the Rocky Mountains, as well as on the Columbia river, from which specimens have been brought by Mr. TOWNSEND. The House Wren, if I am not greatly mistaken, passes southward of the United States, to spend the winter. The other spends that season within our limits.

Dr. BACHMAN informs me that a bird resembling the Wood Wren, as well as the House Wren, so closely that he could never distinguish it from either species, spends its winters in great numbers in South Carolina. Dr. BREWER has favoured me with the following notice respecting the House Wren. "This bird never constructs with us a distinct nest, but always conceals it in olive-jars, boxes, and such things, placed for its convenience around the houses, or in the hollow of trees. Whenever the places in which they build are larger than necessary, they usually endeavour to fill up the vacant parts with additional materials. I have by me a nest built two years since in the clothes-line box of Professor WARE of Cambridge, which is in size considerably more than a foot square; and it must have cost its tiny architect many days of hard labour to have arranged there such a mass of various materials. The variety and size of some of those of which it is composed is truly surprising. Among them are the exuvia of a snake several feet in length, large twigs, pieces of India-rubber suspenders (which, by the way, are old acquaintances) oak-leaves, feathers, pieces of shavings, hair, hay, &c. It contained six eggs, which evidently were suffered to become stale in consequence of the anxiety of the bird to fill up the empty space." The eggs measure five-eighths of an inch in length, and four and a half eighths in breadth.

HOUSE WREN, *Sylvia domestica*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 129.

TROGLODYTES ÆDON, Bonap. Syn., p. 92.

HOUSE WREN, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 422.

TROGLODYTES ÆDON, *House Wren*, Swains. & Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 316.

HOUSE WREN, *Troglodytes ædon*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 427; vol. v. p. 470.

Adult Male.

Bill of ordinary length, nearly straight, slender, acute, subtrigonal at the base, compressed towards the tip; upper mandible with the ridge obtuse, the sides convex towards the end, concave at the base, the edges acute and overlapping; under mandible with the back and sides convex. Nostrils oblong, straight, basal, with a cartilaginous lid above, open and bare. Head ovate, eyes of moderate size, neck of ordinary length, body ovate, nearly equal in breadth and depth. Legs of ordinary length; tarsus longer than the middle toe, compressed, covered anteriorly with six scutella, posteriorly with a long plate forming an acute angle. Toes scutellate above, inferiorly granulate,

R.T.

House Wren

1. Male. 2. Female 3. Young.

In an old Hat.

Audubon, John James. 1841. "The House Wren, Troglodytes aedon, Vieill. [Pl. 120]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 2, 125–127. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319233>.

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