TROGLODYTES EUROPEÛS.

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Common Wren.

Passer troglodytes, Will. Orn., p. 164.

Motacilla Troglodytes, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 337.

Sylvia Troglodytes, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 547.

Troglodytes Europæus, Cuv. Règn. Anim.

——— *vulgaris*, Flem. Hist. Brit. Anim., p. 73.

——— *fumigatus*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., tom. iii. p. 161 ?

Anorthura troglodytes, Macgill. Hist. Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 15.

As it is the habit of the Wren to frequent holes and caverns, hollow stems of decayed trees, and to build round dome-shaped structures for the purpose of roosting in during the long and severe nights of winter, the generic appellation of *Troglodytes* assigned to it is not inappropriate.

The Wren is a cheery little bird, which in its disposition exhibits two very opposite features—shyness and familiarity. The former is shown by the way it retires from man by diving into the thicket and, mouse-like, running under and between the herbage, entering a furze-brake on one side and making its exit at the other, or by creeping through the interstices in a stone wall, and flying unseen to a distance. Its familiarity, on the other hand, is exhibited in its frequently perching in his immediate presence on some upright spray or stone, and pouring forth its sprightly warbling song: this ended, its engagements during the next few minutes are among the flowers of the garden, the interior of the greenhouse, the barn, or perchance the pigstye. The neighbourhood of the ground appears to be its proper province; for, its wing-powers being limited, it seldom resorts to the branches of the high trees, and rarely flies high in the air; hence the Martin, which builds under the eaves, and the Wren which enters by the study window, are the very antipodes of each other in their habits and modes of life; yet the two birds partake of the same kind of food, for both are insect-eaters—the migratory Martin living on winged aerial creatures, and the stationary Wren on those frequenting interstices in the bark, of which spiders and their eggs form no inconsiderable part. The Wren, then, is the familiar bird, equally known to the wealthiest noble and to the inmate of the most remote Highland bothy. Persons living at the Land's End, and those who dwell in the Outer Hebrides, are alike cheered by its presence, amused by its peculiar actions, and charmed with its oft-repeated song. Its constitution is equally adapted to the summer heat and to the extreme cold of our most rigorous winters: how different in this respect it is to the delicate migratory Willow-Wrens—subtropical birds whose plumage resembles the hue of the spring leaves among which they ramble, while the brown colouring of the Common Wren is in unison with the lower part of the heath, the ditch-bottom, and the decaying logs among which it dwells. On the fallen brown bark-covered trees it coquets with its female, and seeks the neighbouring ivy-clad bank, a crevice in the pollard willow, the thatch of the barn, the yew or the cypress in the garden for a suitable breeding-place. In these and many other situations the Wren builds its artfully formed domed structures, either for the purpose of depositing its eggs, or for a roosting-place for the male; for doubtless the number of nests which are made in a garden where there is but a single pair of Wrens is for both these purposes. The cock-nests, as they are very generally called in England, are less neatly constructed than those in which the act of incubation is performed; they are also less complete, being seldom lined with finer materials or feathers.

What other parts of the globe are inhabited by our bird? How many species of the genus *Troglodytes* are there known? and what countries do they inhabit? are questions which my readers would probably wish to have answered. First, then, the Common Wren inhabits all parts of Europe, but does not visit Iceland, as stated by Yarrell and Morris. There is a Wren in that isolated spot, but it is a distinct species from ours—the *T. borealis*. Our bird also visits North Africa, but not India, its place in that part of the world being filled by the *T. Nipalensis* and *T. punctatus* of the Himalayas. Temminck described a species from Japan under the name of *T. fumigatus*; but Dr. Schlegel states, in the 'Fauna Japonica,' that it is identical with our bird, thus affording another instance of the occurrence of European forms in that distant country; but I question whether, like the Iceland species, it may not be distinct. According to Prince Charles Bonaparte, seventeen other species of this genus range over various parts of America, from north to south.

"The Wren," says Macgillivray, "is one of the most familiarly known of our small birds, and is remarkable for its peculiar form and the liveliness of its motions. Next to the Robin it is perhaps the least liable to molestation from boys and idle people; and for this security it is indebted partly to its small size, and

partly to its cheerfulness and innocence. Its aspect is so peculiar that every person must have noticed it as differing from that of other small birds, the body being short and full, the tail elevated or erected, the wings diminutive, and the feet moderate. Excepting the Kinglets, the Creeper, the Chiff-chaff, and the smaller Tits, it is the least of our native birds. Its flight is effected by a rapid and continuous motion of the wings, and therefore is not undulated but direct; nor is it sustained, for the bird merely flits from one bush to another, or from stone to stone. It is most frequently met with along stone walls, among fragments of rocks, in thickets of whins, and by hedges, where it attracts notice by the liveliness of its motions, and frequently by its loud chirring noise. When standing, it keeps its tail nearly erect, and jerks its whole body smartly; then it hops about with great alacrity, using its wings at the same time, and continually enunciating its rapid *chit*. Although it seldom ascends a tree directly, it may often be seen climbing to some height, and on fences and bushes it usually makes its way to the top by hopping from one spot to another. If usually pleased with a low station, it sometimes ascends even to the higher branches of very tall trees, and may occasionally be seen there in company with Kinglets or Tits. In spring and summer, the male utters a very pleasing, full, rich, and mellow song, which it repeats at intervals; and even in autumn, and on fine days in winter, it may occasionally be heard hurrying over its ditty, the loudness and clearness of which, as proceeding from so diminutive a creature, excites one's surprise, even after it has become familiar.

"The nests are found in a great variety of situations—very often in a recess overhung by a bank, sometimes in a crevice among stones, in the hole of a wall, or of a tree, among the thatch of a cottage or out-house, on the loft of a shed or barn, the branch of a tree whether growing along a wall or standing free, among ivy, honeysuckle, clematis, or other climbing plants. When the nest is on the ground, its base is generally formed of leaves, twigs, and straws, and its exterior is often similar; but when otherwise, the outer surface is generally smooth, and chiefly composed of moss.

"Mr. Neville Wood states that the Wren 'often builds itself a dwelling in autumn, and lodges in it on cold nights. Frequently also the nests in which one or two broods have been reared in summer, are tenanted every night throughout winter.'

"On this subject Mr. Weir has sent me the following remarks:—'During the period of incubation, the male (says an anonymous writer in 'Loudon's Magazine'), apparently from a desire to be doing something, constructs as many as half a dozen nests in the vicinity of the first, none of which are lined with feathers; and whilst the first nest is so artfully concealed as to be seldom found, the latter are very frequently seen.' With respect to the use of these structures, if we believe that birds, like some insects, have foresight, a more ingenious theory might be advanced. During the severity of winter they may be intended as houses of refuge for themselves and families. Whether this is always the case it would be difficult to ascertain; but that they are sometimes employed for this purpose I can affirm, as the whole of those in my neighbourhood during the severe frosty weather of 1837–38 were occupied by them. Our little friend is a *Troglodyte*, a frequenter of holes and caverns; and as it always reposes at night in some sheltered retreat, it may occasionally or often betake itself to its old nest as well as to any other place, that nest being well fitted for its purpose."

The eggs are from six to nine in number, of a fleshy-white colour, sparingly spotted and speckled with reddish brown.

For a singularly interesting and detailed account of the manner in which this bird constructs its nest, and of the number of times the young birds were fed during the course of a single day, amounting to no less than 278, I must refer my readers to the notes communicated by Mr. Weir to Mr. Macgillivray, and which will be found at pages 24 to 30 of the third volume of his 'History of British Birds.' In like manner I must refer them to vol. i. p. 349 of Mr. Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland,' for an account of the superstitious and other customs connected with this bird in that country.

The only difference in the outward appearance of the sexes is the somewhat smaller size of the female. The young, when ready to fly, are similarly attired, but of course have the yellow fleshy gape common to young birds.

The figures represent a male, a female, and a young bird of the size of life, on the Common Hop (*Humulus Lupulus*).

Gould, John. 1873. "Common Wren, Troglodytes europæus [Pl. 63]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323877>.

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