

Bewick's Wren

THIS PERKY LITTLE BIRD lives in Eldorado year round. The Bewick's Wren (BW) is 5.25 inches long with a wingspan of 7 inches.

The chestnut head has a white line from the beak over the eye to the back of the head. Back, wings, and tail are a chestnut brown. The head is somewhat narrow, with a small dark eye and narrow, slightly curved bill. The belly and lower wings are light gray; the underneath of the rump and tail have dark bars. The tail seems long compared with the small body and is carried tipped up in a jaunty manner. Males and females are similar. The warning call is made up of thin buzzes and trills. The severe declines of Bewick's Wren in the eastern United States coincide with range expansion in the House Wren. It is suspected that the House Wren frequently removes BW eggs from nest cavities. However, western populations are stable.

I had multiple short glimpses of this little bird over several years, but usually did not get a clear view. The BW moves quickly on the ground, seems shy, and stays in thickets and underbrush.

Both male and female build a nest in a natural cavity, amid roots or in a brush pile. Grasses are used to make the nest suitable for eggs. Pairs are monogamous. The female lays five to seven eggs and does all of the incubation. Helpless young hatch in 12 to 14 days. Both parents feed the young, who fledge in 14 days. Food

includes insects and spiders gleaned off of foliage. Some berries and seeds are consumed in winter. A small number of birds may migrate to central Mexico during the winter months.

The male song shows large geographic variability. For example, an Arizona male has a short, simple song but may have 15 or more distinct songs. Colorado males have long, complex songs but only a few variations. Some studies of song development suggest that much of a species' specific song is learned. Birds raised in a soundproof room who never hear any bird songs (or even other noise) rarely develop anything that sounds like a song of their species. Nonmigratory groups of BWs may pick up the local dialect, which has slowly changed to be distinct in different geographical areas. Vocalization is used for defense of territory, and the BW defends its territory all year long. The BW male learns the song not from its father, but rather from the neighboring territorial males. The song repertoire, developed before the first winter, is retained for life.

—Pam Henline



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