

## A Delightful Song

**THE HOUSE WREN (HW)** is a small secretive bird (4.75 inches long, with a wingspan of 6 inches) that I have seen only a few times around my house—several times skulking under the chairs on my back porch in late fall/early winter and once on the shelf of a bird feeder. They prefer low shrubby habitat. New Mexico is on the border of their summer/winter ranges, so they could be around any season, but more likely in summer. They have several colorations. In Eldorado, the HW is a light reddish-gray on the back and tail, plain light gray-brown on the chest and stomach, with some dark bars on the wings and tail and a plain gray-brown head with lighter eyebrow stripe (a distinguishing mark). The head appears flattened and the bill is slender and longish. Like most wrens, the short tail is usually cocked up in the air. Males and females are similar. Their song is a delightful fast series of rolls descending into a bubbling trill. Winter migration is throughout Mexico. Various subspecies of the HW are found from Canada to Tierra del Fuego.

The male may start building a nest before courtship. He quivers his wings and raises his tail to

prospective mates. Nests are usually in a cavity or possibly an old nest of another bird. The male may put more than 400 sticks into one cavity. When a female pairs with the male she takes over nest building and adds the nest cup and lining. Six to eight eggs take 13 days to hatch and are brooded only by the female. Atrial young (helpless, eyes shut, a little down and no feathers) fledge in 12 to 18 days. Both parents continue to feed the young for about two weeks. Both male and female sometimes destroy eggs of other HWs and other species nesting nearby, although the behavior does not occur while the pair is tending their own eggs. Diet includes insects, snails, millipedes and spiders.

I found a video with song on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8wjCGQhhRI>.

An acquaintance jokingly asked me if our Road Runners "run" south in winter. RRs are non-migratory, but I have not seen them here in winter. Has anyone seen them here?



—Pam Henline