

Marsh Wren
21 Dec 1997
Brenton Slough, Dallas Co., IA
*Sinclair
IBL 68:62, 86

Record Number: 97-64
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Sinclair, 810 N. B St., Indianola [6/9/98]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:62

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

Sinclair, J. 1999. An Iowa winter Marsh Wren. Iowa Bird Life
69:76.

VOTE: 6 A-D, 1 NA

A-D, The bird was not seen well and the description could apply to Sedge Wren as well as Marsh Wren. However, the observer is familiar with the Marsh Wren's call note, which was heard repeatedly.

A-D, Identification of call notes would confirm incompletely seen bird in likely habitat during mild winter.

A-D, Not seen well. Acceptance based on faith that Sinclair can distinguish from Sedge Wren by call note.

NA, Details lacking to say beyond a reasonable doubt that this is a Marsh Wren. A description of the familiar call note would have helped this record. Also if bird was seen from 15 to 40 feet and white throat and breast were seen on a basically brown bird what color was the head, pattern of face and back. Some additional info is needed. The coloration doesn't exclude this being one of the sparrow species as it is written.

A-D, Described behavior and habitat suggestive. Details on bird incomplete (eye stripe?) but apparent familiarity of observer with call notes helps. Not unexpected at this time or location.

RE-VOTE (at meeting 4/19/98): 7 A-D

AN IOWA WINTER MARSH WREN

JIM SINCLAIR

On 21 December 1997, Rick Trieff and I were birding the Brenton Slough area in northeastern Dallas County as part of the 1997 Saylorville Christmas Bird Count. At about 8 a.m., while searching a large cattail marsh, I heard the call note of a Marsh Wren. Despite insecure ice conditions, we spent the next 20 minutes attempting to approach the bird to confirm our initial identification.

In spite of our determined effort, the bird remained elusive and gave us only momentary glimpses. However, the distinctive call note was heard at least six times. What was seen was a small bird with a predominantly dark brown head, mantle, and tail. The breast and throat were white, and the flanks were a lighter brown than the mantle. One quick look at the sitting bird confirmed a wren-like posture including its tail cocked almost straight up.

Prior to 1997, Marsh Wrens had been found three times in Iowa during winter. All three of the reports were from Christmas Bird Counts (Kent and Dinsmore, *Birds in Iowa*, 1996). Besides this account, one other Marsh Wren record was submitted for the 1997 Christmas Bird Count season (S. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 68:42-54, 1998). It is my belief that persistent efforts by Christmas Bird Count participants in the proper habitat will be rewarded with winter records of Marsh Wrens on a regular basis.

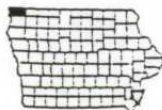
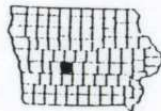
810 North B Street, Indianola, IA 50125

BURROWING OWL NEST IN LYON COUNTY

DOUG HARR

On Sunday, 30 August 1998, I received a call from Dolly Zangger, a fellow birder from Larchwood. She reported observing a Burrowing Owl at a probable nest site three miles east of Larchwood. Having trouble locating the site on my first attempt, I got fresh instructions from Dolly and was able to find the owl.

I encountered a single owl in apparent juvenal plumage, perched on a fence post between the county road and an adjacent cornfield. As is typical with Burrowing Owls, the individual showed little fear and continued perching while I observed it and took several photos from the car window. Although not obvious in the photos, with binoculars the remains of a few pinfeathers could be observed on the bird's crown, nape, and back, indicating it was a young-of-the-year. I saw no evidence of other owls on this or subsequent visits. Dolly Zangger, however, reports that while she never saw more than one bird on her several visits to the site, she observed what she was certain was an adult owl on one visit. The birds apparently vacated the site about a week after the first observations and were not seen again. According to *The Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas* (Jackson et al., Univ. Iowa Press, 1996), nest dispersal usually occurs in early September, and this time period coincides with our observations at the Larchwood site.



97-64

A nest burrow was prominent in the road ditch immediately beneath the post on which the owl was perched. It appeared to have been an old badger den in the embankment on the field side of the road ditch. This site surprised me a bit, as there was little suitable owl habitat in the immediate vicinity, save for the ditch itself. However, I have observed similar roadside owl nests in the eastern Dakotas, so such an occurrence is not unprecedented.

Birds in Iowa (Kent and Dinsmore, 1996) indicates previous observations of Burrowing Owls in Lyon County, but no nest records. Our confirmation of a local nest expands the owl's nesting range in northwestern Iowa to all counties bordering the Big Sioux and upper Missouri rivers. Burrowing Owls normally range throughout the western half of the United States and probably once were relatively common in the prairies of northwestern Iowa. Although apparently declining in eastern portions of their range, the species still shows up every few years somewhere in western Iowa.

1223 Dement Street, Larchwood, IA 51241

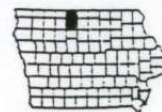
SMITH'S LONGSPURS IN KOSSUTH COUNTY, 1998

MATTHEW C. KENNE

Smith's Longspurs were found in Kossuth County in October 1998, the first documented sighting of their fall migration in Iowa in more than 70 years. Described as rare migrants in western Minnesota and rare spring migrants in Iowa, Smith's Longspurs are also erratic, secretive, and frequent habitat that usually offers little to entice birders in mid-April and mid-October. I hope my encounters reported here encourage others to widen their search for Smith's Longspurs, enjoying the thrill of discovery while giving us a more accurate measure of their occurrence in the state. For me, Smith's Longspurs are diamonds in the rough, and well worth the effort.

Maynard Reece Waterfowl Production Area consists of 300 acres of gently rolling former cropland dotted with restored wetland basins. Half of the area was planted in native grasses in 1997, but in the spring of 1998, the other half was still soybean stubble. Recalling their regular locations in Johnson and Louisa counties, the area seemed like great habitat for Smith's Longspurs. I searched the area several times in early April for Smith's, but without success. On 24 April, when I checked for shorebirds, I could see swirling flocks of small birds over a distant rise. I was eventually able to stalk into the middle of about 100 Smith's Longspurs as they chased each other around. When chasing, they often gave a buzzy call note I'd not heard before in addition to the regular "tic-tic-tic" in flight. The molt appeared complete by the end of April, with the black-and-white head pattern of breeding plumage males visible on some birds.

By the fall of 1998, the habitat at Maynard Reece W.P.A. had changed somewhat but still looked very promising. Newly planted native grasses had one season of growth and the widespread pigweed had been mowed, sprayed, and mowed again, leaving sparse ankle-high cover. As I stopped to check shorebirds on 7 October, the possibility of finding Smith's Longspurs was on my mind. It was a couple of weeks early, but there had been a report from the Twin Cities earlier in the week. I flushed several American Pipits and many Savannah Sparrows around the pools, but was still surprised when a Smith's Longspur flew up, calling repeatedly. It circled around



DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

99-64

What species? Marsh Wren How many? 1

Location? Brenton Slough, Dallas Co.

Type of Habitat? cattail marsh

When? date(s): 12/21/97 time: 8am to 8:05am

Who? your name and address: Tim Sinclair, 80 N. B St. Indianapolis

Others with you: Rick Trieff

Others before or after you: _____

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

First alerted to the bird by its familiar call note. In severe ice conditions made approaching the bird difficult - see Mr. Trieff for details. Bird first seen at 15 ft flying directly away - small bodied, long tailed basically dark brown bird. Next seen briefly perched in reeds - white breast and throat and brown flanks and wren posture. Next view added no details. Call note was heard at least six times.

Similar species; how eliminated: _____

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

Seen twice in flight and once briefly while perched. Conditions and lighting good; Bird seen from 15 to 40 ft with 10x42 glasses
Previous experience with species and similar ones: Plenty

References and persons consulted before writing description: _____

How long before field notes made? 7 hrs this form completed? 5 days

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).