

The Carolina Wren

By Martin Hagne

The Carolina Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus* is a small reddish-brown wren that loves yards and neighborhoods. Wrens tend to skulk and conceal themselves, so you might not see them too often! And they do love dense vegetation.

You have probably heard them, but might not have known what the sound was. For such small birds, they sure have a loud singing voice. The males belt out “teakettle-teakettle.” Both males and females average only 5 inches long, and weigh only what 8 pennies would weigh.

Carolina Wrens live all across the eastern United States, and into Mexico with a disjointed group living in the Yucatan. They do have some minor regional differences in color and size, but some have noticeable different songs depending on where they live, like a language dialect. I used to hear the Lomita subspecies of this wren when I lived in the Rio Grande Valley.

Carolina wrens can use any vegetated habitat, such as brushy thickets, lowland cypress swamps, bottomland woods, and ravines. They do tend to gravitate toward shrubby, wooded residential areas, overgrown farmland, dilapidated buildings, and brushy suburban yards.

Carolina Wrens are quite adaptable and will nest in almost anything! Here at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory we have found nests all over, including in a canoe, under the stair railings, in an RV hitch, and inside of a BBQ pit! We’ve also heard of them nesting in boots, hats, and almost anything else they can find. They surely would prefer a natural cavity in a tree about 3-6 feet up, but have readily adapted to the human structures in their habitats. They lay 3 to 7 eggs per nest, and can do that 1 to 3 times per nesting season.

If you want to attract Carolina Wrens, they will come to backyard feeders for black oil sunflower seed, but mostly for suet. They also enjoy bird baths. More importantly, insects and spiders make up the bulk of this wren’s diet. Common foods include caterpillars, moths, stick bugs, leafhoppers, beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, and cockroaches. Surprisingly, Carolina Wrens occasionally eat lizards, frogs, or snakes. They also consume a small amount of plant matter, such as fruit pulp and seeds from bayberry, sweetgum, or poison ivy.

Carolina Wrens are one of the more common birds across their range and their populations actually increased between 1966 and 2019, unlikely so many bird species. Therefore, they are listed as a species of low conservation concern. However, since cold, icy, and snowy winters can abruptly reduce local populations. Luckily, they do tend to recover in a few years. The gradually warmer winter temperatures over the last century may have been responsible for their northward push.

See if you can’t find a pair of Carolina Wrens to enjoy in our yard! Keep an eye out for a fast-moving little brown bird in the trees.

Photo credit: Mike Williams

Photo Caption: Male and Female Carolina Wrens look much alike.