



# Local Nestbox Users | Wrens

## IDENTIFICATION



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### **House Wren** *Troglodytes aedon*

- Brown back and head
- Faint brown eyebrow and eye ring
- Black bars on the wings and tail
- Short tail with black bars
- Light grey-brown belly
- 4.75 inches long

### **Bewick's Wren** *Thryomanes bewickii*

- Brown back and head
- Bright white eyebrow
- Black bars on the wings and tail
- Long tail with white on the edges
- Grey belly
- 5.25 inches long

Wrens are small brown birds. They have narrow heads with long, thin bills. Their tails are often raised sharply upwards. They are vocal birds and are most commonly seen darting about in shrubby vegetation.

When trying to classify wrens it is easiest to start by comparing the tail length and the brightness of the eyebrow.



## BEHAVIOUR

Bewick's wrens are not migratory and can be found year-round in our area. They feed primarily on insects, though they will also forage for seeds and fruit during winter. Bewick's Wrens are often seen flicking, fanning, and wagging their tails as they hop through vegetation. Only male Bewick's wrens sing – either to attract mates or defend their territory. Their complex song begins with a few short whistles, drops to low warbles and burrs, and ends in trills. If their nestbox is approached, they will likely scold you with incessant short, raspy calls. Though still common in western North America, this species has all but disappeared in the east.

House Wrens are found all over North America as well as in South America. House Wrens primarily eat insects and spiders although they will also eat snail shells (believed to be for digestion and calcium supplement) on occasion. House Wrens are migratory and travel as far south as Mexico in winter. House Wrens are successful competitors: they have been known to remove eggs and young from the nests of other birds or build their own nests on top others' offspring. They may also peck holes into the eggs of other birds.

## HABITAT

Wrens can be found in diverse habitats, wherever shrub and thicket cover is present. They also do well in yards and parks. House Wrens are particularly fond of nesting near human structures.

## NESTING

Male wrens start several nests before the female wren chooses which nest to finish off with an egg “cup” of finer materials – this cup differentiates the true nest from the incomplete, or “dummy,” nests.

**Bewick's Wrens** build a tall nest of twigs, leaves, and grass. They have 1-3 clutches per season in which they lay 3-8 small white eggs with brown speckles.

**House Wren** nests are made of twigs, messily piled or neatly stacked to the top of the cavity and topped with an egg cup lined with soft material like feathers, grass, and hair. They have been known to put spider egg sacs in their nests, possibly to ward off mites and other parasites. House wrens have 1-2 clutches per season with 3-10 pale pink or pale grey eggs, spotted reddish-brown.

Although House Wrens are aggressive nest competitors, **wrens are native species and it is illegal under federal law to disturb their nests.** Discourage House Wrens by repositioning a nestbox further from human structures and dense vegetation (between breeding seasons).



Photos: (top) Julia Daly, (bottom) Kathryn Martell, GOERTS

Learn more about wrens, see photos, hear their calls, and more at Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds ([www.allaboutbirds.org/guide](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide)).