

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WYOMING SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 213

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Subject: LONG-BILLED MARSH WREN*

General

The long-billed marsh wren (Cistothorus palustris) is winter resident in tule- and cattail-covered marsh areas where they arrive in late September and migrate northward

Food Requirements

Aquatic invertebrates comprise a large portion of the diet of the marsh wren. Feeding is done on or near the surface of the water, and types of insects eaten are related to their abundance and availability. Plant materials, especially cattails, may be eaten in drier areas where ample standing water to support abundant insect populations is not available.

Water Requirements

Standing water provides the usual foraging area for the marsh wren. The presence of water around cattails in breeding areas may be important in protecting the nest from predators.

Cover Requirements

Marsh wrens winter around marshy lakes and probably do not range above 8,000 ft (2,428 m) in elevation in this region. They are found in areas with a thick growth of reeds (Phragmites spp.), rushes (Scirpus spp.), and cattails (Typha spp.). Thick stands of emergent vegetation are used by marsh wrens for cover.



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*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Reproductive Requirements

Marsh wrens are generally winter residents in this region, although they breed commonly in the San Luis Valley of southwestern Colorado. Nesting communities are found in tules, cattails, and adjacent stands of marsh grasses. Nests are dome-shaped with a side entrance, constructed of cattails, and fastened to vegetation two or three feet above water in areas of cattails or tules. Nests are found within 180 yds (164.6 m) of water.

Special Habitat Requirements

Male marsh wrens use perches on the tips of the tallest marsh growth within their territory for singing and displaying.

Interspersion Requirements

Average territory size of marsh wrens in Washington range from 540 yd (450 m) to 754 yd (628.5 m). Territory size apparently is related to the distribution of marsh vegetation. A mixture of aquatic vegetation and numerous areas of open water are preferred by marsh wrens.