

Bewick's Wren

We often take our wren family members who live in close proximity to our houses for granted, especially the Bewick's and Carolina wrens. We see them, hear them and think, "It's a wren," and continue our current activities. You also might get peeved with them because they are trying to build a nest in a shoe or other nook and cranny in your garage.

The Bewick's Wren, pronounced as the "Buick" car, is often assumed to be the "house" wren, but that name is reserved for one of our winter residents. While here, the House Wren is usually found in brushy habitats rather than in your garage. However, when in his summer northern breeding range, the House Wren takes on the habits of our Bewick's and Carolina wrens of hanging around buildings and woodpiles, hence the name "house" wren.

This summer the Bewick's have successfully raised two broods in an old pitcher hanging on a nail by the kitchen door in spite of a household consisting of four resident cats. What comfy nests they build. If I was a baby bird, I'd want to be a wren. We live in an old house with some obvious, and some not so obvious entries for small critters. The wrens nested in the cellar in a side saddle hanging from a beam for several years. They could perfect their flying skills there before heading out into the bigger world and all its hazards. A number of years ago, the Bewick's built a nest over the door in the front hallway. Not using that part of the house much, they were already well along in the process before being discovered. We opened an upstairs window close by so the fledglings had a direct route out when they began to leave the nest.

The ten species of wrens found in Texas are divided into seven genera. The Bewick's, Carolina, Rock, Cactus and Canyon wrens all belong to different genera, while the other five species are divided into two different genera. Marsh and Sedge wrens belong to one genera and the House and Winter wrens belong to the other. Each of these seven genera lives in a wide variety of habitats ranging from dry rocky deserts to wet streams and marshes.

Bewick's Wrens, more western birds, prefer drier open woodlands and brushy habitats. The eastern edge of their range is roughly the Texas/Louisiana border, north to Kansas and westward to California. One sub-species of the Bewick's Wren lives in the Pacific Northwest. The Bewick's Wren family is divided into three groups, the Eastern (East Texas, Arkansas, and eastern Oklahoma), Interior West (Texas to Eastern California), and Pacific Coastal (Southern California to Canada). Within the ranges of these groups, the birds have distinct plumage variations. The eastern birds are brown, the interior birds are gray, and the pacific area birds are ruddy brown. The Hill Country birds are gray. The other wrens, Carolina and House, which might be confused, are brown. Color is not the only distinguishing markers to separate these small song birds.

Bewick's Wrens have slender profiles with long tails and bills. Their upper plumage is dark gray with light gray under plumage and distinct white eyebrow line. They have a habit of wagging their tails from side to side. Carolina Wrens have more stocky profiles, brown and tan plumages and slightly shorter tails. Both have white eyebrow line. House Wrens are browner, have shorter tails and no eyebrow lines. With a little study and experience, identification of these three species is fairly easy.

Another way to separate these three wrens is by voice. Bewick's song is a high thin buzz and warble, a pleasant song to enjoy. Carolina's song is loud and melodious, "*teakettle, teakettle, teakettle.*" The

House Wrens do not sing as much during their winter stay, but in late spring they can tune up with bubbly whistle notes. All wrens are known for their ability to sing and do not refrain from showcasing their talent.

If you are curious regarding the wrens interest in your garage, porches and other open buildings, they are intently searching for their favorite food, spiders. Their long, slightly de-curved bills are excellent in probing cracks and crevices for insects and spiders. Because they are seemingly unafraid of humans, they prefer to nest where their predators may be wary of human presence. My advice to you is to enjoy your little wren friends, share your space with them, and appreciate their songs and insect scavenging abilities.