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*Nebraska Ornithological Union*

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**SIGHTING OF A CANYON WREN IN KNOX COUNTY, NEBRASKA**

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The Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) is found in all states west of the Rocky Mountains; however, east of the Rockies it resides only in western Oklahoma, and in western and central Texas, with a separate population in the Black Hills of Wyoming and South Dakota. It has never been recorded in North Dakota or Kansas, or in any state whose entire boundaries lie east of the 100th meridian (DeSante and Pyle 1986). This species is almost entirely resident over its range, although a few most northerly populations depart in winter, and there are some altitudinal migrations to escape winter weather (Webster 1983).

Nebraska appears to be the only state outside the Canyon Wren breeding range with a record of the species. Johnsgard (1980) lists the species as accidental in Nebraska, with individuals having been

seen on two occasions in Dawes County in recent years. Johnsgard states that Canyon Wren vagrants in Nebraska are to be expected, as the species is a permanent resident in the Black Hills. In bordering South Dakota, the species is an uncommon, but local, permanent resident in the Black Hills; however, there are no records of Canyon Wrens in other areas of this state (SDOU 1991).

Bray et al. (1986) also list this species as accidental in Nebraska, citing a single, documented record of a Canyon Wren seen January 20, 1974 by Richard C. and Dorothy Rosche in Dawes County. This bird was studied carefully as it fed in Smiley Canyon at Fort Robinson (Rosche 1982). Two other Canyon Wren sight records from northwestern Nebraska have been published, but both lack any description. One was seen by L. Bruner on August 12, 1903 in Sioux County (Bruner et al. 1904), and the other was observed by Doris Gates on April 11, 1972 in King's Canyon, Dawes County (Gates 1974). This paper provides the first photo-documentation for the Canyon Wren in Nebraska, and extends the dispersal range of this normally sedentary species an unprecedented 350 miles east of the nearest known breeding locale.

On the morning of May 17, 1992, Dave Heidt and I found a Canyon Wren in the Walker's Valley View Development Area, on the south shore of Lewis and Clark Lake, Knox County, Nebraska. This locale consists of a small housing development in a steep, wooded north-south canyon adjacent to Lewis and Clark Lake, approximately three miles south and eight miles west of Yankton, South Dakota. The bird was heard vocalizing, and was first observed singing from a deck rail of one of the area's homes. The following characteristics were noted:

The bird had the chunky body appearance of a wren, and was noticeably larger than a House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*). The most apparent field marks included the reddish lower breast, wings, and back, contrasting with white throat and upper breast. The crown was a lighter grayish coloration than that of the back. The long, slightly decurved bill was very apparent. Upon inspection, one could see that the upper mandible was black and the lower, a paler, flesh coloration. The reddish tail was barred with black, and the underbelly and back were spotted with black feathers.



Photo by  
Mark Brogie

This Canyon Wren often perched on the rooftops of the homes in the area, and was easily located by voice. We had a National Geographic tape with the vocalizations of this species, and the

calls given by the Knox County bird were identical to those on the tape: a loud, descending series of "tews". The wren readily responded to the tape, and at one point came within five feet of the observers. It was constantly moving, and did not seem to stay in one area for more than approximately 15 minutes. It would move from one rooftop to another, although it was observed several times foraging on the ground.

The Canyon Wren was observed or heard by numerous people for more than three weeks in the same general locale where it was first sighted -- an approximate quarter-mile stretch of canyon, starting near the large cliffs bordering the Missouri River, and extending south up the valley. My last sighting took place on June 9, 1992. I have photographs of the bird, and others have been sent to the Nebraska Records Committee, and to the publication *American Birds*.

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