



Audubon at Home in Northern Virginia

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Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

Often heard before it is seen, the Carolina Wren could be said to have the loudest voice in the woods. When it appears, it is the largest and reddest of the wrens in eastern North America, being a rich, red-brown above, with white chin, buffy underparts, and a conspicuous white stripe over the eye. Its beak is long and slightly down-curved and it cocks its tail in characteristic wren fashion. Carolina Wrens are year-round residents of the Mid-Atlantic. Pairs sometimes stay together all year. Males will often stop to sing, even in bad weather, throughout the year. Songs are varied, but the most commonly heard resembles *tea-kettle, tea-kettle*.

What Carolina Wrens Need

Food: Carolina Wrens have a varied diet but mostly eat arthropods like stink bugs, caterpillars, moths, cockroaches and eggs, spiders. Juvenile skinks, tree frogs, berries and seeds complete the menu. They come to bird feeders for suet, mealworms, sunflower seeds and peanut hearts.

Breeding: Nests are built in tree cavities such as old woodpecker holes, or in upturned tree roots or the crotch of a tree. In suburban areas, Carolina Wrens often choose strange places to build—garage shelves, mailboxes, open bags, pails, pockets of old clothing—anything except a nest box. The nest is a bulky mass of grasses, weed stalks, and inner bark and leaves with a lining of feathers, moss, hair and fine grasses.

Shelter: Birds seek shelter in wood and brush piles, and in dense shrubbery of residential yards and gardens. In winter, they will sometimes roost on porches near a warm chimney, out of the wind.

Other: Carolina Wrens may visit birdbaths or ponds for drinking or bathing.

Resources:

Plants—available at Nature By Design, Hyla Brook Farm, DeBaggio Herbs, Merrifield Garden Center and other local nurseries

Bird feeders, food, baths—available at local bird supply stores

Pond liners—available at local home improvement stores

Model Carolina Wren Habitats:

Reston Parkland—www.reston.org

Meadowlark Gardens Regional Park—www.nvrpa.org/meadowlark.html

Runnymede Park—www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dranesville/Parks.htm#runnymede

How You Can Help

- Avoid pesticides that kill the food supply for wrens.
- Leave leaf litter on the ground under shrubbery in your yard and gardens to encourage snails, millipedes, and other critters.
- Provide birdfeeders with suet, sunflower seeds and/or peanut hearts.
- Plant low to mid-size trees. Consider downy serviceberry, ironwood, chinquapin, pagoda dogwood, sweetbay magnolia, sweet crabapple, and American wild plum. Most Carolina Wren nests are built 1-10 ft. above ground.
- Add native grasses like little blue stem and Indian grass to provide nesting material.
- Keep cats indoors.
- Construct a brush shelter to offer hiding places.
- Plant shrubs such as southern and swamp bayberry, inkberry, juniper and wintergreen.
- A small pond or birdbath can be beneficial.
- Carolina Wrens may be attracted to apartment balconies by putting up feeders or offering mealworms.

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