

The thin, fine-pointed bill, short tail, and chubby body at once suggest that this month's mystery photograph is a wren. Although the posture and overall shape of the bird in the photograph are slightly reminiscent of one of the small sparrows in the genus *Ammodramus*, its bill shape and lack of a flat-headed appearance immediately remove any of the sparrows as possibilities.

Returning to the wrens, the obvious eye stripe indicates that the bird must be one of only three wren species so marked that regularly occur in Massachusetts. The Carolina Wren can be eliminated because the pictured bird clearly has white back stripes, and its eye stripe is not wide nor does it extend far enough back on the rear of the bird's head. Only two stripe-backed and white-browed wrens remain for us to consider—Marsh Wren and Sedge Wren.

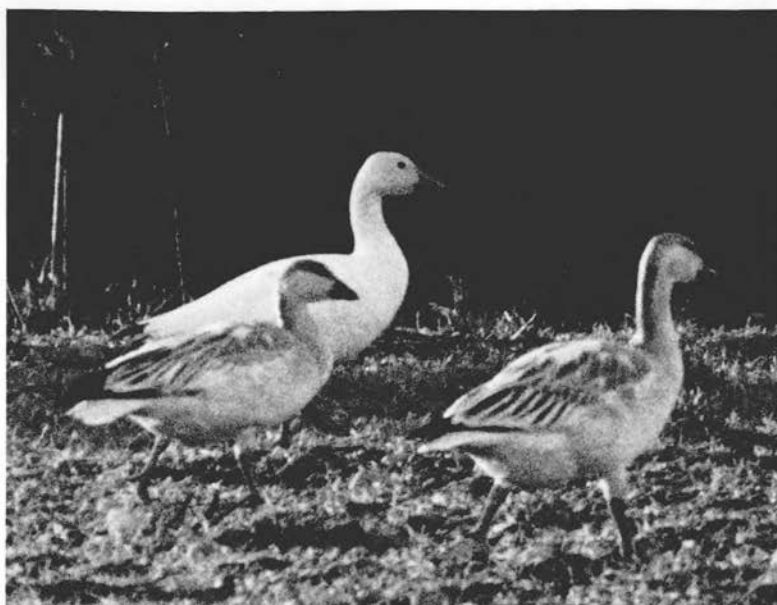
Marsh Wrens tend to look very dark, especially on the upperparts, where the blackish center of their back makes their bold white back stripes particularly conspicuous. They also have dark, unstreaked crowns that contrast dramatically against their broad white eye stripes. As their former name of "Long-billed Marsh Wren" would suggest, their bill is relatively long and slender compared with that of the Sedge Wren. Sedge Wrens also have a streaked crown and generally less contrast between their back and its white stripes. In addition, their eye stripe is more narrow and less well defined than in the Marsh Wren.

A careful look at the features described indicates that the mystery bird is a Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*), which is the rarest of the regularly occurring wren species in Massachusetts. Most often located by their staccato, chattering song in a moist, grassy meadow during the summer, Sedge Wrens also occur as rare spring and fall migrants. The pictured Sedge Wren was photographed in Worcester County by Robert Bradbury.



AT A GLANCE

Photo by Michael La Bossiere



Can you identify these birds?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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