



*Photograph by Leslie A. Campbell*

Certain bird groups “just have a look about them” that is often as helpful in identifying them as are their specific field marks. This month’s At a Glance bird is in such a group.

To anyone who sees a member of the wren family, regardless of where in the world it may be, there are a few features that invariably give the identity of the family away. Perhaps the most consistent trait within the wren family is the habit of keeping the often short, stubby tail cocked over the back, especially when not postured for advertising or territorial singing. During these times, the short tail is sometimes angled downward, but during most other activity it is held at a distinct upward angle, sometimes 90 degrees or more, over the back.

In addition to their tail posture, wrens tend to be small, especially the eastern wrens, and predominantly brownish in color, often with distinct barring on their tails, wings, or flanks. Some wren species possess distinct superciliary stripes (i.e., eye stripes), back stripes, or spots in the tail. Furthermore, all wrens have thin, relatively long, decurved bills. While the mystery bird can’t be heard singing, song is another easy way to distinguish wrens, since all species are highly vocal and have distinctive songs.

Now that we know the bird in the photograph is a wren, the question becomes “which species?” Recalling the list of variable features described above, it appears that the wren in the picture does not have a distinct superciliary stripe, nor does it appear to have striping on the back or white spots in the tail. It

does, however, show a distinct pale eye-ring, and it appears to be rather pale on the underparts.

Of the eastern wren species, the absence of an eye stripe, back stripes, and tail spots at once eliminates the Carolina, Marsh, Sedge, and Bewick's wrens as possibilities. This leaves only the Winter Wren and the House Wren as likely candidates. The Winter Wren is our smallest wren species and is characterized by its overall dark coloration, very stubby tail, and prominently barred flanks. Although the flanks are mostly concealed in the photograph, the decidedly pale underparts and medium-length tail are very obvious. When these latter features are combined with the presence of a distinct pale eye-ring, the only remaining possibility is House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*).

The House Wren is a widespread and common summer resident and migrant throughout most of the lower elevations of Massachusetts, although it is scarce or lacking as a breeder on the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. As their name suggests, House Wrens will often nest in birdhouses close to human habitation.

Correction: The House Wren photograph in the February issue was incorrectly credited to Wayne Petersen. As the photo credit indicates, this photograph was taken by Leslie A. Campbell.

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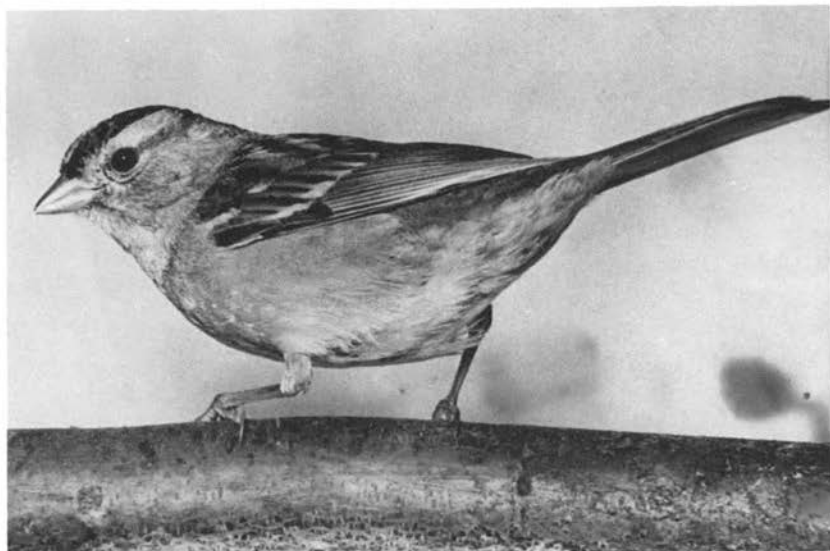


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## AT A GLANCE

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Can you identify this bird?

*Photograph by M. G. Smith*

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

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