

MORE NESTING BOXES, MORE HOUSE WRENS

By Lillian Cardinali

Having lived on a 34 acre farm for over twenty years, and having been nature lovers since school days, Mr. Cardinali and I have kept notes on the bird activities near us. Although the House Wren is not one of the favorite birds of either of us, it has become one of the two most watched. The Eastern Bluebird is the other.

Six years ago, Mr. Cardinali started building Bluebird and House Wren nesting boxes along and within our poultry range fence. Each year he has added to the number and each year more House Wrens have nested here on the farm. This year, there were thirty-two boxes in about an eight acre space. Boxes are made so that the tops can be removed for easy cleaning and disinfecting, which is done in late fall, as well as for convenience in banding nestlings. Most boxes are built of old material and all are left to weather. They are placed $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 feet from the ground, facing toward the center of the range, in other words, away from the woods which surround the range on three sides.

We have found House Wrens will nest fifty feet from a Great Crested Flycatcher; this it has done the past two years. They will nest about the same distance from a Bluebird; this happened this past season. The Bluebird had two broods of four nestlings each. The Great Crested Flycatcher had six nestlings.

The first House Wren nestlings were banded June 9. Of the three boxes, one had seven and the other two had six each. The second group was banded June 17; again there were three boxes, one with eight nestlings and the other two with six each. The one with eight nestlings was the only box placed about ten feet up in an old oak tree near the fence. It has since been lowered. We had hoped a Chickadee would use the box. There was much activity outside that box, with eight to feed.

On July 5, after watching for six days the movements of the parents bringing food to one box, we opened the box on the seventh day to find six nestlings dead. The parents had not been seen nor heard near the box the entire day.

Many House Wrens used the same boxes for a second brood. One did not even change the nesting material, just added more fine grass.

The House Wren does not seem to care what type of opening it has, as long as it can carry in the twigs and coarse sticks it needs for its nest. Some openings are one by two inches, others are round, $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter.

The last four nestlings were banded on August 22. Nestlings were divided as follows:

1 box of 8 nestlings
2 boxes of 7 each
7 boxes of 6 each
3 boxes of 5 each
2 boxes of 4 each
3 boxes of 3 each

This made a total of 96 nestlings from June 9 to August 23.

Since I received my banding permit in 1957, House Wrens banded are:

1957: 36	1959: 78
1958: 39	1960: 113

This explains the title of this article.

Various of these Bluebird and House Wren boxes on the range have been used also by a White-breasted Nuthatch, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Carolina Chickadee nesting at the same time, during the 1959 and 1960 breeding seasons. Eastern Kingbirds, Song Sparrows, and Chipping Sparrows nest within the range on the trees and shrubs.

Returns of the House Wrens have been rather sparse but at least there are some each year.

27-79110 banded 8-18-58	returned 6-11-59 and again 5-26-60
28-80871 banded 8-11-59	returned 5-7-60
28-80759 banded 5-28-59	returned 5-25-60
28-80808 banded 7-21-59	returned 7-14-60

Watching the antics of the House Wren as closely as I do, one can appreciate the help they give by destroying the nest of the House Sparrow. They carry out the material and let it drop, then go in again for more until the House Sparrow's nest is a so-called wreck. This has happened repeatedly in many boxes.

The Wren tried the same method on Starlings but does not have so much success. But with a little help by a human hand, Starlings are also discouraged.

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