

## COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

Accepted 7-0

SEDGE WREN  
Cistothorus platensis

Location: Ft. Lyons marsh (NE corner of John Martin Reservoir; 1/2 mile north of intersection of HH and 16 Rds.); Bent County; Ft. Lyons, Colorado

Date: November 2, 1996

Background:

I was birding with Brandon Percival at about 12 noon. We were walking together, on parallel tracks, going south along the watery edge of John Martin Reservoir marsh. This is a marsh consisting of high wet ground, sloping down to the edge of a cattail marsh. We were just above the cattails on mostly solid or shallow flooded ground. This area consists of tall reeds (about waist high) and shorter sedges (about knee high) with patches of weedy ground. Brandon found the bird in a sparse, flooded grove of sapling cottonwoods. These are small trees (about 2-4" diameter and less than 20 feet tall) that died in flooding of recent years. Weeds and tumbleweeds had blown into this area making it even more tangled and hard to walk through. This is where Brandon first encountered the bird. It flew up and landed on a small horizontal twig about 2 feet off the ground, and just inches above the surrounding weeds and dried vegetation. Although it appeared nervous, often turning and changing position on its perch, it stayed here for about 5 minutes (during which time Brandon observed the bird continuously). I arrived at the spot and the bird continued to cooperate and gave us both wonderful clear views in our binoculars (mine are B & L Elite 10x40s) for an additional minute or two. After that the bird entered the reeds/sedges and was nearly impossible to flush. When it did, its flight was weak and low, just above the vegetation. The bird was distinctively buffy, tiny and short-tailed in flight. After a short flight it would nearly immediately dive back into the reeds and grass to disappear. It was very secretive except when it was first flushed. It called once in flight, with a distinctive "CHICK" note -- quieter, softer and less emphatic than the call of a Marsh Wren. As we initially observed this bird we were able to discuss the field marks out loud as we watched it.

Description:

This was a very small "little brown bird" about 4-5" long. It was overall light brown (above) and buffy below. The bill was very small, acute, slim and nearly straight with just a slight downcurve. It was quite short-tailed and held the tail cocked up as it nervously watched us. The crown was medium brown and strongly streaked with fine blackish flecks. The back was black with numerous fine, white pencil-fine stripes. The wings and tail were brown, barred with tan. The chin and throat were buffy. The undersides were light tan, richer and buffier on the belly. The undertail coverts were pale buff and the flanks were vaguely barred. The face was buff, lighter than the crown and back, and there was an indistinct light superciliary.

Similar Species:

Small size, cocked-up tail and bill shape indicate a wren. House, Winter, Carolina and Bewick's wrens all have striped (not plain) undertail coverts, lack a distinctly streaked crown and do not have black and white backs. The Canyon and Rock wrens have white throats, lack the black back with white streaks and are not buffy underneath. Of course the Marsh Wren is the main I.D. problem. However, directly compared to the Marsh Wren, this bird was: 1) smaller, shorter, 2) shorter-tailed 3) had a shorter straighter bill, 4) had many narrow white streaks on the back (not broad white ones), 5) had a streaked crown; 6) plain buffy undertail coverts, 7) pale buffy (not white) chin and throat. This was a generally light, buffy/light-brown/tan bird, not a darkish brown/reddish bird like a Marsh Wren.

Experience with Species:

I have seen Sedge Wren once before in Colorado (October 17, 1991) as well as in several times in Wisconsin and Texas.

This report was prepared from notes made at the time of observation.

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