

Troglodytes musculus (Southern House Wren)

Family: Troglodytidae (Wrens)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Southern house wren, *Troglodytes musculus*.

[<http://www.tnaturelink.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/House-Wren-Garden-Birds-Trinidad.jpg>, downloaded 8 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Troglodytes musculus* size ranges from 11.5-12.5cm for both male and female, and they weigh about 12g (Handbook of the birds of the world, 2017). The crown and back are grey-brown, with blackish barring on the wing and tail, and a faint eye ring and eyebrow (Fig. 1). The thin long bill has a blackish upper mandible and a black-tipped yellowish or pale grey lower mandible. The legs are grey or pinkish, and there is a cocked short tail (Wiwords, 2017).

DISTRIBUTION. The species can be found all over South America, parts of Central America, and some Caribbean islands (Fig. 2), including Trinidad and Tobago.

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. The southern house wren can be found almost everywhere; this includes arid areas or those with high rainfall. *Troglodytes musculus* spend their time foraging for food or nest building. During the breeding season, the male and female wren share the labour of

nest building, both wrens contribute to collecting the first sticks for the preliminary part of the nest construction, afterwards the job of lining is left to the female while the male continues to collect more sticks while singing (Skutch, 1953). Once the wren has produced a brood of hatchlings in the nest, either the male or female wren can be seen obtaining food to feed the hatchlings, and the previous brood may also be seen helping the parents obtain food for the next brood (Skutch, 1953).

FOOD AND FEEDING. Their diets consist of invertebrates, some examples are grasshoppers, spiders, cockroaches and caterpillars (Fig. 3) (Handbook of the birds of the world, 2017). They often search for food in pairs, regularly calling each other to maintain contact (Trinidad and Tobago NatureLink, 2012). The wren will flit, hop and creep in areas such as a quiet rustic building where they will pluck spiders and cockroaches located in the surroundings. They explore the bushes, gardens or tall grasses for food, they hunt for their prey while being surrounded by dense herbage, and they hop or walk slowly (Skutch, 1953). The wren can also be seen climbing up the trunks of trees; they ascend sideways rather than like a woodpecker with body upright, and they pluck invertebrates from the crevices on the trees (Skutch, 1953).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. These wrens are territorial. They will attack a neighbouring nest of another species within their territory, by breaking the eggs or killing the hatchlings. This can be seen as competition for nesting sites (Kattan, 2016). Little is known about how large the territory is as they are scattered widely (Skutch, 1953). Their nest can be found in a variety of locations; on, above or below the ground; in the natural environment or in man-made objects. The nest tends to be situated where it can be sheltered from rain and is rarely higher than 5m above the ground (Skutch, 1953). At times the nest may be threatened by ants, these ants destroy the nest which will cause the wren to desert it. The nest may also be destroyed by humans if it is situated in a location such as a saddle-bag, banana bunch or other object that human frequently use. The wrens may also be subjected to parasitism by cowbirds (Skutch, 1953).

REPRODUCTION. *Troglodytes musculus* produce 3-4 eggs in a clutch, with an incubation period of 15-18 days. The incubation is done by the female without the help of the male. The wren will produce three or four broods in the breeding season, which will total between 11-16 eggs (Skutch, 1953). Young wrens usually leave the nest on the 18th day after hatching, some on the 19th day, but if frightened the young may leave the nest earlier. Members of the brood tend to leave the nest together. Once the young wrens leave the nest they follow their parents to feed. During the evening, the young wrens are led by their parents to an area to sleep; on the first day it is not usually far from the nest, or the parents may lead them back to the nest to sleep. The strength and ability to fly varies from brood to brood even at the usual departure age of 18 days, and the period at which the parents stop giving attention to their offspring and allowing them to stay within their territory varies for each brood (Skutch, 1953).

BEHAVIOUR. When a predator is near a wren's nest containing a brood of young wrens, the parent wren must choose to either continue to provide parental care or to abandon the nest for a brief moment. This risk-taking decision seems to be based on the needs of the offspring, and predation risk may affect the parental investment of the wren (Fernández et al., 2013).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Troglodytes musculus* is listed as Least Concern and may be considered common or abundant due to its large range. They also tolerate humans and benefit from changes to the habitat caused by humans.

REFERENCES

- Fernández, G. J., Corral, M. G. and Llambías, P. E. (2013). Sexual differences in risk-taking behaviour of the Southern house wren during the nestling rearing stage. [https://link-springer-com.ezproxygateway.sastudents.uwi.tt/article/10.1007/s10211-013-0177-x](https://link.springer.com.ezproxygateway.sastudents.uwi.tt/article/10.1007/s10211-013-0177-x)
- Handbook of the birds of the world. (2017). Southern House Wren (*Troglodytes musculus*). <http://www.hbw.com/species/southern-house-wren-troglodytes-musculus>
- Kattan, G. H. (2016). Heterospecific Infanticidal Behavior by Southern House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon musculus*) Suggests Nest Site Competition. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxygateway.sastudents.uwi.tt:2048/docview/1868525580?OpenUrlRefId=in%20fo:xri/sid:primo&accountid=45039>
- Skutch, A. F. (1953). Life history of the southern house wren. <https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/condor/v055n03/p0121-p0149.pdf>
- Trinidad and Tobago NatureLink. (2012). Birds of Tobago: Home and Garden 1. <http://www.ttnaturelink.com/category/quick-guides>
- Wiwords. (2017). God birds. <http://wiwords.com/word/god-bird>

Author: Edwin Yeung

Posted online: 2017



Fig. 2. Southern house wren geographic distribution.

[<http://www.hbw.com/species/southern-house-wren-troglodytes-musculus>, downloaded 11 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Southern house wren carrying a bee.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/photo/southern-house-wren-troglodytes-musculus/bird-carrying-bee>, download 12 March 2017]

For educational use only - copyright of images remains with original source