

A CAROLINA WREN INVASION OF NEW ENGLAND.¹

BY CHARLES W. TOWNSEND, M. D.

PRIOR to the summer of 1908, the Carolina Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus*, has been but an accidental visitor in New England north of Rhode Island and Connecticut, and a rare summer visitor in these two southern States. Beginning with the summer of 1908 reports of this bird in the vicinity of Boston and in other parts of New England became so frequent, that it has seemed worth while to collect as many as possible of these reports, in order to determine the extent of what may be called an invasion into the Transition Zone of this Upper Austral bird. The cause or causes of this invasion I shall not attempt to decide, but it is natural to suppose that unfavorable conditions in the South, or favorable conditions in the North, or both combined may have been causative factors; or, on the other hand, that such favorable conditions existed in the South that the birds increased and survived beyond their normal belt with a resulting overflow to unoccupied area. In any event, the abnormally mild winter of 1908-'09 was favorable to the stay of this bird in a region north of its usual winter area. It can hardly be expected that the Carolina Wren will make the extension of its range permanent, for it is probable that in past times before records were kept, the same or similar favorable circumstances for extension have occurred, yet the extension has not been permanent.

Before recording the occurrence of the Carolina Wren in New England during the last year, *i. e.* from May 1, 1908, to May 1, 1909, it may be well to give briefly the previous standing of this bird in the different States.

Maine: two records, one of a breeding pair.² *New Hampshire*: two records.³ Mr. Charles F. Goodhue of Penacook, N. H., writing under date of April 23, 1909, adds a third record for the State. He says: "I have a fine male in my collection taken at Webster, N. H., April 25, 1902, which is, so far as I can learn, the second

¹ Read before the Nuttall Ornithological Club, May 3, 1909.

² O. W. Knight, *The Birds of Maine*, Bangor, 1908, p. 585.

³ G. M. Allen, *A List of the Birds of New Hampshire*, Manchester, N. H., 1903, pp. 172, 173.

specimen ever taken in the State. *Vermont*: "A rare visitant in the southern part of the State."¹ No definite record. Bennington? Cutting." *Massachusetts*²: "A very rare visitant from the South." Some six records and also a pair thought to be breeding are given by Howe and Allen.³ Since the publication of this record and prior to the present invasion, there have been four records of a single bird and one of a breeding pair reported in 'The Auk.' *Rhode Island*: "A very rare summer resident"; one breeding record.⁴ Since the publication of the above, the Carolina Wren appears to have been a fairly regular visitor and to have occasionally bred in southern Rhode Island. *Connecticut*: Dr. Louis B. Bishop, in a letter dated April 15, 1909, kindly wrote me as follows: "I have no records of the occurrence of the Carolina Wren in Connecticut before 1891. . . . Mr. W. H. Hoyt of Stamford informed me that two were taken there in the fall of 1891 and it had been frequently noticed since, and that he believed it then occurred regularly. Mr. John Schaler of Stamford gave me much the same information, but he did not find it till 1894. Mr. W. R. Nichols of Branford told me on June 6, 1894, that a pair had bred in Branford for several years, but had not been seen that year, their breeding place having been cut over. Between New Haven and Guilford I found them in the fall of 1902, the two collected being young birds, and noted two in the fall of 1903. From then I have no record of the Carolina Wren in Connecticut until those reported by Mr. Clifford Pangburn in this April 'Auk,' and I believe the cold winters of 1903-4 and 1904-5 exterminated them."

In the following report it is sometimes difficult or impossible to determine whether the same bird has been seen in two nearby localities, or whether two different birds have been observed. In some cases it seems probable that different birds have been found, owing to the relatively stationary habits of the Carolina Wren and its restricted feeding area, while in other cases this point is definitely

¹ G. H. Perkins and C. D. Howe, *A Preliminary List of the Birds found in Vermont*, New York, 1901, p. 116.

² R. H. Howe, Jr., *Review of Perkin's Birds of Vermont*, Longwood, Mass., 1902, p. 21.

³ R. H. Howe, Jr., and G. M. Allen, *The Birds of Massachusetts*, Cambridge, Mass., 1901, p. 92.

⁴ R. H. Howe, Jr., and E. Sturtevant, *The Birds of Rhode Island*, 1899, p. 84.

settled by the observation of the two birds at the same time in the two areas. Only two of the birds are reported to have been shot, but fortunately the definite character of the shape, markings and action of this bird, as well as its characteristic call notes and song, have made its identification easy and certain. Besides those reporting the Wrens numerous other bird-students have had the opportunity to study these interesting and entertaining birds. One cannot help comparing the reception of these birds to-day, with their probable fate twenty years ago or less, had the invasion occurred then.

MAINE.—A male Carolina Wren was first seen at *Falmouth*, Maine, on August 18, 1908, by Mr. Ernest Brewer. From that date to October 3 it was seen by numerous observers. On October 3 it was shot by Mr. Arthur H. Norton, and the specimen is now in the collection of the Portland Society of Natural History.¹

NEW HAMPSHIRE and VERMONT.—I have been unable to obtain any record for the occurrence of the Carolina Wren in these States during the last year. For this negative report as regards New Hampshire, I am indebted to Dr. Glover M. Allen, Mr. Francis G. Blake, Mr. C. F. Goodhue, and Mrs. W. R. Varick; as regards Vermont, to Prof. G. H. Perkins.

MASSACHUSETTS.—Mr. Ralph Hoffmann tells me that no Carolina Wren has been noted in the *Berkshires* as far as he can learn. Mr. R. O. Morris of *Springfield* writes me under date of April 20, 1909: "There are no records that have come to my knowledge, and I doubt if the invasion extended to this part of the State."

In the eastern part of the State, especially in the vicinity of Boston, records abound. At *Ipswich*, Mr. A. C. Bent and I found a Carolina Wren on February 7, 1909, in a planted spruce thicket near a house close to the sea. I saw the wren again on March 7. It was within a hundred yards of a Cardinal that had been there for a month. Mrs. Lidian E. Bridge saw this wren on February 22 and March 12; on the last named date it was also seen by Mr. H. W. Wright.

In *Middlesex Fells*, a Carolina Wren was seen by Mrs. Bridge on October 3 and 4, 1908, and on March 7, 1909, while one was seen in the same place by Mr. Wright on November 13, and two on November 16, and December 4, 1908.

¹ Journal Maine Ornith. Soc., Vol. XI, 1909, pp. 4-10; also Auk, Vol. XXVI, 1909, p. 82.

At *West Medford*, Mrs. Bridge reported a wren in song observed by Mrs. Ruth Coolidge on August 10, 1908.

At *Concord* one was seen by Mrs. Bridge on October 9, 1908, and Mr. F. B. McKechnie saw one in this town on April 5, 1909. He was told it had been seen in the same locality for two weeks previously.

At *Arlington Heights* Mr. George Nelson saw a Carolina Wren on August 15, 1909, and heard him on August 16.

Cambridge. On September 7, 1909, Mr. Wm. Brewster discovered two Carolina Wrens in his garden, where they remained a week or ten days. They were seen also by Mr. Walter Deane and Mr. H. A. Purdie. In a letter to me from Mr. Brewster dated March 26, 1909, he says of these birds: "I took them to be a pair of fully adult birds. One of them sang rather frequently, especially in the early forenoon. After seeing *them both* in the garden one morning I walked up Sparks Street to a stable on Concord Avenue beyond Huron Avenue and fully a quarter of a mile from our place. On arriving at my destination I heard a Carolina Wren sing several times in a yard next that in which the stable was situated. This bird must have been a different one from the other two. I did not see it."

In *Brookline*, close to Boston, it is apparent that two pairs of Carolina Wrens passed the summer in localities not more than three fourths of a mile apart; both of these pairs came under my observation on several occasions. Of the pair observed at Dudley Street, Miss Blanche Kendall writes me as follows: "I first heard and saw the Carolina Wren on July the twenty-third, and on the twenty-ninth I discovered that there were two. They remained until the afternoon of December thirteenth when they disappeared during that first heavy snow-storm. We enjoyed seeing and hearing them all summer, and they grew very tame by fall, coming to the suet; on to the windowsill, and even inside the room for seeds and nuts." I saw one of these birds on July 30.

At High and Allerton Streets in the same town a pair of Wrens had been seen and heard by the residents since about July 16, 1908. I saw one or both on July 29, August 18, September 3 and 30. After the last of August they spent the nights in the end of a rolled up matting screen suspended from the roof of the piazza of Dr. F.

P. Denny's house on High Street. I inspected these birds at close range on the evening of September 3, by the light of a wax taper. The two were so rolled up in a ball, with feathers puffed out, that it was very difficult to make either head or tail of them. I touched the tips of their feathers without awakening them. Dr. Denny told me the birds left in the latter part of November.

A third pair of Carolina Wrens in Brookline has been reported to me by Mr. Clarence Little. About October 15, 1908, a pair of these birds appeared at his place on Goddard Avenue, about half a mile from the Dudley Street pair. They remained through the winter and up to the date of his writing, May 1, 1909. On this date he writes: "We have seen them with one or two exceptions every day, and they have been seen chiefly in or around an old woodpile. As yet, however, we have seen no carrying of nesting material."

Jamaica Plain. On Bowditch Hill Dr. Harold Bowditch identified a Carolina Wren on August 23, 1908, which had been singing in the vicinity of his house for several weeks. He recorded its presence in the same place during September, and of two birds there after September 25. Also from that date until March, 1909. He says in a letter of April 5, 1909: "The birds were always recorded within an eighth of a mile of our house, on our place or on one of those adjoining it." These birds were both seen by Mr. F. H. Allen on September 3, 1908.

In another part of Jamaica Plain, Mr. James L. Peters found a Wren on September 21, 1908, which "was seen off and on until nearly the first of November." Mr. Peters considers this was probably the same bird that he found on July 17 in Franklin Park, less than three quarters of a mile away. It is possible that the same Wren may have been noted by Mr. Jack who writes under date of April 19, 1909, as follows: "In October at least one Carolina Wren came on several different dates, about my house on Forest Hills Street, Jamaica Plain, always noted and discovered by its peculiar call, its last visit being noted on November 2."

Mr. C. E. Faxon writes me under date of April 13, 1909, that "Two Carolina Wrens appeared here [at the Arnold Arboretum in Jamaica Plain] this summer *about* August 1, and stayed *about* three weeks when they were disturbed by some work going on near

their favorite haunts and moved on. The male sang almost constantly." These birds were also reported by Mr. J. G. Jack.

West Roxbury. Mr. J. S. Codman¹ saw a Carolina Wren in West Roxbury on November 8, 1908, and again on November 26. (Jamaica Plain, the Arnold Arboretum, Franklin Park and West Roxbury are all included in the City of Boston.)

Cohasset. Mr. J. G. Jack has given me the record of a Carolina Wren during the latter part of August and all of September, 1908, at Sandy Cove in Cohasset. After this month Mr. Jack did not visit Cohasset until February 22, 1909, when he again found the Wren in the same spot. Mrs. Bridge found the Wren there on March 17. At Scituate, in the thicket of the Glades, Mr. H. W. Wright found a Carolina Wren singing on April 10, 1909. This spot is about a mile across the water from Sandy Cove.

Naushon Island. On July 13, 1908, Mrs. Bridge found a Carolina Wren in full song at this island. On the following day she discovered that there were a pair of Wrens there, and she heard the male sing on the 15th and 16th. She writes me under date of March 2, 1909: "Later in the season my cousin Mr. Ralph Forbes reported to me several Wrens [at Naushon], probably the young." As Mr. Brewster² reported the nesting of a pair of Carolina Wrens at Naushon in 1901, it is possible that they may nest at this southern station not infrequently.

There have been, therefore, at a moderate estimate during the last year about twice as many Carolina Wrens seen in Massachusetts as have been reported in all previous years.

RHODE ISLAND.—Mr. R. G. Hazard reports the breeding of the Carolina Wren in Rhode Island.³ At *Peace Dale* he found more than one pair during the summer of 1908, but records no nests. July 13 is the earliest date he gives. Mr. Leon J. Cole⁴ found during the summer of 1908 "at least two, and possibly more Carolina Wrens resident at *Kingston, R. I.*" Late in July is his earliest date.

Mr. Edward Sturtevant, under dates of April 17 and April 30,

¹ Bird Lore, 1909, Vol. XI, p. 86.

² Auk, Vol. XVIII, 1901, pp. 397, 398.

³ Auk, 1908, Vol. XXV, p. 480.

⁴ Auk, 1909, Vol. XXVI, pp. 81, 82.

writes me that a pair made their home near his house at Newport last summer, and mentions April 19, 1908, as an early date. This year he has had two in the same place since March 24.

CONNECTICUT.—Mr. A. W. Honywill, Jr., reported in 'Bird Lore Census' ¹ a Carolina Wren seen at *New Haven* on December 25, 1908. Mr. C. H. Pangburn ² found two Wrens in the same locality at New Haven on December 29, and shot one there on January 2, 1909. Dr. Bishop, in his letter above referred to says: "Mr. Dwight B. Pangburn tells me that he or his brother, Clifford, have seen as many as three at one time this past winter in the region mentioned in 'The Auk'; but that none have been seen since March 10."

I wish to thank the numerous observers who have kindly put their records at my disposal, and have made this report possible.

SOME ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT RELATING TO THE HISTORY OF TOWNSEND'S BUNTING.³

BY RUTHVEN DEANE.

THROUGH the kindness of the late Mrs. Lucy Audubon Williams,⁴ I am enabled to add a more detailed account of the capture of this unique specimen, as furnished to Audubon by Dr. John K. Townsend⁵ on September 27, 1833. Audubon's first mention of this bird (*Orn. Biog.*, Vol. II, 1834, p. 183, pl. 400; Vol. V, 1839, p. 90) merely states that it was discovered in the vicinity of Philadelphia, and it is not a little strange that he did not give such details

¹ Bird Lore, Vol. XI, 1909, p. 22.

² Auk, Vol. XXVI, 1909, p. 195.

³ *Spiza townsendii* (Aud.), A. O. U. Check-List of North American Birds, second edition, p. 331, 1895. Hypothetical List. "Its peculiarities cannot be accounted for by hybridism, nor probably by individual variation."

⁴ Mrs. Lucy Audubon Williams, born June 30, 1838; died February 21, 1909

⁵ Dr. John Kirk Townsend, born October 10, 1809; died February 6, 1851.



Townsend, Charles Wendell. 1909. "A Carolina Wren Invasion of New England." *The Auk* 26, 263–269. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4070797>.

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