

625-01-2002

Sedge Wren at Presque Isle State Park, June 1, 2002.

One observer:

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Location:

The general area at Presque Isle State Park including the northern end of Niagara Pond, the Yellow Bass Pond area, and the southwest end of the Ridge Pond Area. This area is bounded on two sides by Dead Pond Trail (to the east and northeast) and the Sidewalk Trail (to the west and southwest).

Weather and other facts:

Temperature: ~60F

Wind: W or NW 10-15MPH

Sky: Cloudless

Time: ~8:00AM and again at ~10:30AM

Equipment: Minolta 8-20x50 binoculars set to 8x

Photos or audio recordings: none

First encounter:

At about 7:45AM I entered Dead Pond Trail at the Thompson Circle, and turned right to proceed in the direction of B Trail. A hundred and fifty or so yards in from this point is an unmarked trail off to the left that leads to the northern end of Niagara Pond, which I took.

While scoping the pond for the various possibilities there, I periodically heard a slight chipping far off to my right (~north), much like the single chips a Common Yellowthroat may give. A brief investigation of the area yielded nothing but a few yellowthroats, so I turned back to the pond.

Again, I heard the chipping, this time closer. The closer range allowed for a better examination of the sound, which had a quality to it that didn't quite fit the Common Yellowthroats that were everywhere that day. This time I left the scope behind and proceeded to the north in search of the source. Having moved just 25 or 30 feet, the bird sounded off again, this time in full song. The song was much like the chattering of a yellowthroat, but perhaps less rapid and shorter in duration. It could be described as three distinct chips followed quickly by a rapid trill, all on the same pitch. There were perhaps six to ten notes in the trill, like "chip, chip, ch-trtrtrtrtrtrtr", but the notes of the trill were not very distinct as this description may indicate. Most yellowthroats I have heard tend to draw the trill out longer and/or more rapidly, and usually without the distinct introductory chips. Judging very roughly by the song, the bird seemed to be a few dozen yards ahead of me.

Fairly positive of a Sedge Wren, I still wanted visual verification, since a variant Common Yellowthroat chatter was still possible. Over the next few minutes, I continued to move slowly in the direction of the bird, which continued to chip and gave the song two or three more times. The overall timing of the song was simply not right for a Common Yellowthroat, especially the evenness and regularity of the first three notes followed by the trill.

Eventually, the bird came into view, quietly hopping around on the ground and in the grasses about thirty to forty feet in front of me. The few looks that were afforded were brief but diagnostic.

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The bird was quite small and generally buffy overall, perhaps slightly smaller than the omnipresent Common Yellowthroats and distinctly smaller than a Song Sparrow (also nearby). The tail was short and buffy with the hint of thin, darker transverse stripes along its length. There were whitish and blackish stripes along the otherwise buffy mantle, and the wings, too, were streaked with white, black, and buff. It had basically buffy underparts with no hint of streaking fading to a whitish breast and throat. The bill was relatively short and wrenlike, not sparrowlike. It had a noticeable creamy colored supercilium, which was not very bold. Good clear looks at the head were very fleeting but recognizable.

It could be distinguished as a Sedge Wren in several ways from the most closely similar species, Marsh Wren. It had a lighter back and rump (not the ruddy or rufous of the Marsh Wren); it had less contrasting streaks on the mantle; it lacked the bold supercilium of the Marsh; the tail was short; and, most obviously, its song. The thin, wren-like bill, among many other attributes, separated this bird from any sparrow species.

During the observation, the bird gave a few chip or chip-chip calls but never sang. It was, however, clearly the same bird that was singing earlier, as it was the only bird in proximity to the last song I heard. It was very elusive; in about fifteen minutes of attempting to observe it, the bird was in view only for a total of about twenty or thirty seconds. Eventually, I could hear the chips getting farther away from me again, farther toward and into the extreme northern end of Niagara Pond. At this point I turned and walked back to my telescope.

Second encounter:

At around 10:30 or 10:45 that morning, the temperature had risen into the 70s, and I found myself on the Sidewalk Trail. Near the extreme southwestern end of the Ridge Pond (which is to the northeast of the trail at this point), I could hear the same "chip, chip, ch-trtrtrtrtrtrtr" far off over on the other side of Ridge Pond. The song was easily recognizable as the same as that of the Sedge Wren I had observed earlier. I was basically trapped on Sidewalk Trail, so I stood on its edge and listened intently for the next ten minutes. The bird sang again perhaps a dozen times, sometimes sounding closer and other times farther away (probably due to the wind), but always beyond the opposite side of Ridge Pond from where I stood. Given the scarcity of the species in PA, and that fact that I was in the same general area as the earlier observation, I decided that I could not claim more than one individual. Eventually I wandered back down the trail toward my car which was parked at the south end.

I have recorded Sedge Wrens in Ohio, Ontario, and Michigan. This was my first PA record of this species.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Sedge Wren (Cistothorus platensis)

Date of Sighting: 1 June 2002 to 1 June 2002

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County: ERIE *60 ft*

Observer(s): ~~George~~ Malosh

Date of Submission: 2002 *60 ft*

Submitted by: ~~George~~ Malosh

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Heathcote			X					
P. Hess			X					
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
R. Leberman			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments: *7/0*

Signature (Secretary): *[Signature]*

Date: *2/11/03*