

Breeding Bewick's Wren in Western Illinois:

A Birder's Perspective

by James L. Funk

In most parts of southern Illinois ... and even in localities where the true House Wren occurs, Bewick's Wren is far the more numerous of the two.

-- Robert Ridgway 1889.

The presence of nesting Bewick's Wrens (*Thryomanes bewickii*) in west-central Illinois the summer of 1998 generated a fair amount of interest from birders. The species was found at three locations in Adams and Pike counties during the nesting season and at least one of those spots produced fledged young. How has the abundance of Bewick's Wrens changed over the past 40 years in this particular area? If you missed the birds this year, what are your chances in 1999? Does having a gas

grill in your backyard really increase your chances of success? Inquiring minds....

To answer the first question, I checked the "first arrival" records and some daily lists kept by my parents, Loraine and Eunice Funk, beginning in 1947. Early arrival dates for the years 1947-1975 average about 28 March for Bewick's, with the earliest being 10 March in 1950 and the latest being 3 May in 1952. (Perhaps we were especially busy farming that spring?)

These dates correspond with those found in Bohlen (1989) for the rest of the state and give a good indication as to when to expect this wren's infrequent occurrence elsewhere in Illinois.

Daily lists during the spring season of those years (1947-1975) included Bewick's Wrens about half the time, but the species became more difficult to find after 1968 and was not seen at all during 1974. My own lists show that I heard one individual singing at the south end of Meredosia Bay in Morgan County in April of 1971 and that this was the first I had seen or heard since 1968.

After the mid-1970s, Bewick's Wrens were scarce enough in our area that any sighting merited attention. Probably the most attention given one individual bird was in April of 1977 or 1978 when a Bewick's landed on the railing of our small-town church during Sunday services and burst into song. A fair portion of the church congregation headed for the door! Knowing our family's reputation for the unusual, the rest of the congregation didn't seem to mind.



Drawing of Bewick's Wren by Denis Kania.