

Napa-Solano Audubon's Rare Bird Alert #3 - Winter Wren - Olema, Marin County, 1-22-2021

Greetings Napa Solano Audubon Members, Family & Friends:

Periodically, we will send out Rare Birding Alerts of uncommon or rare species that have been seen in our area. On January 3rd, Lucas and I were able to find a Winter Wren while birding along Olema Creek in the Olema Campground near Point Reyes Station. This Winter Wren is a close relative of our more common Pacific Wren and the 3rd Marin County record. The first record was a bird banded at Pine Gulch near Bolinas in 2012, and the 2nd was found by Todd Easterla in 2013, which was observed by many birders as it moved around the Point Reyes Station area.

Location: The Olema Campground is located just South of Point Reyes Station and North of the little town of Olema along Highway 1. After birding along Bear Valley Road, Lucas and I decided to look for birds in the nearby Olema Campground that is situated on Olema Creek. Please note that there is an \$8 Day-use Fee and the Campground has asked visitors not to arrive before 8:00 a.m. Although the campground was noticeably quiet with little bird activity, while “pishing” to attract birds along the creek, we heard a bird giving a strange, rapid chimp note that seemed off for a song sparrow’s contact call. Lucas was hoping that it was a Winter Wren, when sure enough, out it popped. The Winter Wren was split into 3 species in 2010 the Pacific Wren found in coniferous forests of the Pacific Northwest south to Northern California, the Winter Wren found in the Northeastern US and Canada generally East of the Mississippi in old growth forests, and the Eurasian Wren found in Europe. Until then, as they are all similar in plumage, they were considered the same species. However, there are distinct differences genetically and they exhibit strong differences in song. Lucky for us we had heard Winter Wrens on several occasions, the most recent when birding in Solano County with Roger Muskat along Putah Creek in October, 2019.

Identification: Virtually identical in plumage, both our Pacific Wren and the Winter Wren are only 4 inches long with dark brown tones on their flanks, back, and wings and subtle spotting and barring on their flanks and vent. The Winter Wrens that we have observed appear slightly paler in plumage with more rufous tones and heavier barring especially along the flanks and vent. Both are also lighter in the upper chest and throat and have a distinctly lighter supercilium. These Wrens usually cock their short, stubby tail while poking through the underbrush often hopping along the ground and poking in decaying logs. The songs of both of these species are remarkably similar; long, high-pitched, tumbling notes that can often last for 15-20 seconds. However, the repertoire of call notes are noticeably different and the best way to distinguish these two species. Unlike the Pacific which has a short, usually doubled “chit-chit” call note, the Winter has both the double note and a significantly longer series of assertive, rapid chimps that sound more nasally, similar to a song sparrow. For the best comparison, go to the Sibley App or to Cornell’s Xeno Canto Sound Library found at <https://www.xeno-canto.org> . For more information on these amazing little wrens go to Cornell’s All About Birds located at https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Pacific_Wren/overview . For more photos and recordings that we took in Olema go to our eBird post at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S78604063> .

