



Rock Wren, Fredonia, New York
29 Nov-3 Dec 1986 *Allen Benton*

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES
48. ROCK WREN IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY:
A FIRST NEW YORK STATE RECORD

TERRENCE P. MAHONEY

In the early afternoon of 29 Nov. 1986, I was attracted by a lively small bird that continually bobbed up and down on a rock in front of my neighbor's garage. Occasionally it would fly to the ground and pick at scats of my neighbor's dog, then return to a rock or cinder block and continue to bob.

I was viewing the bird from within my house at a distance sometimes as close as twenty-five feet while it foraged near the garage. With Canon 8x30 binoculars, I could see that it had a slightly decurved bill, light eyeline, grayish breast with slightly darker streaks leading down to a white belly, and a light wash of orange on its flanks. The bird's upper

parts were an overall grayish-brown, mottled with many fine black and white flecks. Later, when these flecks were viewed through an Optolyth telescope provided by Robert Sundell, they appeared the shape of raindrops, the pointed end being black and the rest white.

The bird's tail ended with a buffy mark which had a black stripe before it, a feature not always visible. Unlike other wrens, this bird at no time cocked its tail while I was watching.

My immediate reaction, since I had never seen a Rock Wren before, was that this possibly might be a Carolina Wren which had not reached adult plumage. The Carolina Wren is the only wren likely to be seen here at that time of year. However, examination of the *Master Guide to Birding* convinced me that this must be a Rock Wren, despite the fact that its normal winter range is in the southwest United States. I phoned Allen Benton, who came over and confirmed my identification. He also took numerous color photographs which, taken together, show all of the field marks.

Fortunately, the Rock Wren stayed behind my neighbor's house for five days. Late on 3 Dec. 1986 the first real snowstorm of the winter struck, and the bird was not seen after that. During those five days, the bird was seen by about 30 birders from western New York and was photographed by several.

The diagnostic features which I observed and which separate this species from all other wrens are fine dusky streaking on breast, orange flank feathers (Canyon Wren also has orange flanks, but has a white throat and breast), buffy tail tip with black sub-terminal band, faint whitish eyebrow, and habit of sitting on rocks and bobbing.

Rock Wrens have been observed both east and west of New York in Ontario, Canada, and in Massachusetts. This is the first record from New York State. Able (1983) asked five active birders to list the next ten species likely to be found in New York; the Rock Wren was not included on any of the lists. It was remarkable that such a rare bird should make its appearance next to the home of the President of the Lake Erie Bird Club.

I am grateful to Allen H. Benton for assistance in the preparation of this paper, and for supplying the photograph which accompanies it.

Literature Cited

- Able, Kenneth P., 1983, Trends in the state list of New York birds. *Kingbird*, 33(1): 6-12.
104 Clinton St., Fredonia, NY 14063