

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Fishing by a Winter Wren: During a February visit to Connetquot River State Park, I was sitting on the bank of the Connetquot River observing numbers of about 3/4-inch-long trout fry holding against the current in shallow riffles. I watched a Winter Wren foraging along the eroded bank on the far side in a typical wren fashion. The bird suddenly dashed through several feet of 1/2 inch deep water, grabbed a small fish and rushed back to the bank. It then beat the fish against the ground several times and swallowed it head first. The wren then resumed its previous foraging behavior, working upstream, investigating nooks and crannies among the roots in the eroded banks. During the five minutes that I observed the bird, it twice more suddenly ran several feet into the stream, caught a fish, returned to the bank, beat and swallowed its prey and returned to terrestrial foraging behavior. It's catch each time was a small fish, and the only fish I observed in the shallows were recently hatched trout. Eventually the bird moved upstream to where the water was deeper, and disappeared from my view. I had previously noticed how Osprey, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Belted Kingfisher, crows and gulls have taken advantage of the abundant trout of all sizes in the river. I was surprised to see that a Winter Wren can be such an opportunistic feeder. During the time I observed the bird, I never saw it eat anything in its terrestrial foraging, yet that is where it seemed to concentrate its attention despite great success in its aquatic endeavors (3 large protein rations on 3 attempts). It wasn't apparent to me that the bird was really paying special attention to the water. It seemed that possibly the fish's motion caught the bird's eye, and the bird responded and then reverted to its "normal" feeding behavior. As far as I could see, it didn't really seem to be keying on this specialized resource of abundant small fish in very shallow water. It seemed to concentrate its energies on much less productive foraging on the shore. Perhaps this could change with time and continued opportunity. Of course the bird knows its business much better than I do. Well, anyway, we've seen Herring Gull adjust to garbage dumps, and Brant adapt to golf courses, so, fish hatchery managers, beware!

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