



**Ounce for ounce, the Carolina Wren
is the bird with the most attitude**



Come on punk, make my day!

Brunswick Wildlife Got Attitude?

You want attitude? Pound for pound...actually ounce for ounce...the Carolina Wren is the Lower Cape Fear's bird with the most attitude. The wren is only exceeded at times by an occasional mockingbird or a visiting New York cab driver.

The mockingbird arguably has the baddest attitude because, when defending its territory, it sometimes attacks people, its own reflection in a window, and other birds. And who hasn't seen a mocker terrorize a cat?

The wren, however, weighs about three quarters of an ounce and the mockingbird weighs an ounce more plus the little guy is just as loud.

In my backyard over the past two years, Carolina Wrens have nested and provided my wakeup call, instead of the mockers from previous years. While I have seen mockingbirds scatter other suet feeding interlopers, they do not seem to go after wrens.

The wren is a year-round, non-migratory resident and a habitat generalist. In addition to backyards, it may be found in successional scrub; brush in power line easements; bottomlands and cypress swamps; bay pocosins; and almost any patch of woods, generally preferring wetter areas. In dense cover, with its loud repertoire, it is more likely to be heard than seen.

Wrens eat insects almost exclusively; however, they eat some seed and fruit plus suet. They generally forage on or close to the ground but sometimes forage on the trunks and branches of trees like creepers and nuthatches.

Males and females are almost identical in plumage. Males are often slightly heavier and have longer bills...differences not notable in the field. Wrens maintains their territory and monogamous pair bonding all year not just while breeding.

In natural areas, Carolina Wrens usually nest in open cavities. In backyards and other human-altered settings, they often build in nooks of houses and unused containers. They generally have multiple broods each year...two in the northern part of their range and possibly three in the south. Both sexes build the nest and males assist greatly with the care of nestlings and fledglings.

Carolina Wren populations are stable and increasing over most of its range. With the warmer climate, wrens have greatly expanded northward over the past century. Very cold periods with ice and snow, however, may greatly impact local populations temporarily when their food sources are under frozen cover long enough to cause starvation. Also, fledglings in early broods may die of exposure.

I cleaned out my bluebird nest box last week and cut back the shrubs to open up its flight approach. My bad! Unfortunately, I was late. A bird was already building a nest inside. It was probably my wren since the box was not yet suitable for bluebirds.

How do I know it wasn't last year's nest? Because of the cat hair! A day earlier, I brushed my cat and placed the wad of hair from the comb under the shrubs. It had taken only a day for the hair to be woven into the freshest layer of nest material.

Unfortunately, the old layers of grass underneath and the inside of the box itself had dead insects and their residue. Therefore, I had to remove the nest completely and clean the inside of the box.

The wren may begin to build anew unless my making the box suitable for bluebirds also made it unsuitable for wrens. Actually, I hope it will nest in the box because I do not mind if species other than bluebirds use it. First come, first served.

Many experts suggest supplying animal hair for nesting material. I am now an advocate after witnessing how quickly a bird used it.

It seems strange that birds would use the hair of a mortal enemy to line their nest...until you see, as I have many times, a nest lined with a snake's shed skin.

Being a new member of the hair club for birds, I tried a new experiment this morning. I supplied the contents of my dryer's lint filter which is chock full of cat hair. Now that should prove popular!

John Ennis

