

OCCURRENCE OF THE ROCK WREN ON VANCOUVER ISLAND AND OTHER ISLANDS IN THE STRAIT OF GEORGIA

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The Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) is widely distributed throughout Mexico, the southern United States from central Texas west to California, and north to southeastern Sakatchewan and west to southwestern British Columbia. In British Columbia it is rare to uncommon in the Rocky Mountain trench, the Fraser River Valley, southern Vancouver Island, and the central interior. In the southern interior, from the US border north to Kamloops, Salmon Arm, and Revelstoke where it is a regular breeder, the Rock Wren is moderately common and local in summer and occasionally in winter. A few breeding records are known for the southern portion of the central interior, and there is one breeding record from Genoa Bay, on southeastern Vancouver Island.

The purpose of this note is to update the occurrence of the Rock Wren on Vancouver Island and on other islands in the Strait of Georgia since the publication of *The Birds of British Columbia* (Campbell et al. 1997). Four records prior to 1997 have been discovered in the Wildlife Data Centre library and two post-publication records have been donated to the Wildlife Data Centre by Michael and Joanna Preston and the late Doug Innes.

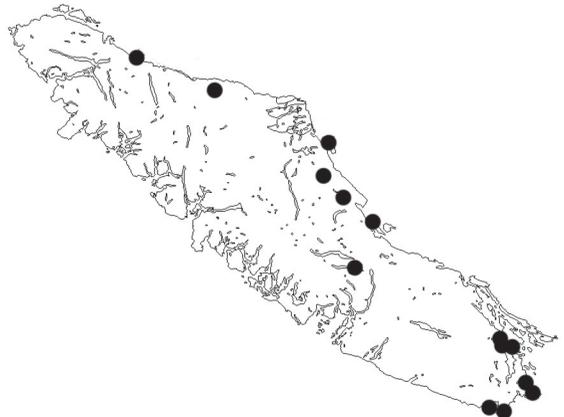


Figure 1. Distribution of the Rock Wren on Vancouver Island, 1959 - 2003, from the Wildlife Data Centre, Victoria.

The earliest known occurrence on Vancouver Island is from David Stirling on 28 September 1959 (Stirling 1960). The bird was observed regularly at Cattle Point, Victoria until 15 November. Additional records included in *The Birds of British Columbia* (Campbell et al. 1997) are for 1 November 1969 (Sooke; specimen), 5 June through 25 September 1970 (Genoa Bay; nesting), 3 November through 30 December 1975 (Mount Douglas, Victoria), 21-29 May 1988 (Mount Tuam, Saltspring Island), 20 September 1990 (Rocky Point, Metchosin), 30 June 1991 (Cluxewe estuary; Dawe et al. 1995), and 19 August through 27 September 1995 (Mount Tzouhalem, Duncan). There is only one record known for Denman Island from September 1964 (Hesse and Hesse 1965). There are no historical records for any other islands in the Georgia Strait or for the western half of Vancouver Island.

Three additional records were discovered in the Wildlife Data Centre library. On 16 June 1967, one bird was observed singing in a clearcut near Sproat Lake, Port Alberni. A second observation was from Mount Tolmie, Victoria on 27 June 1991, where a bird was observed foraging on a rock outcrop in an open Garry Oak woodland. On 31 May 1989, BC Wildlife Branch biologist Rick Davies reported a Rock Wren from Northy Lake near Campbell River. This bird was singing among a rock pile adjacent to the road.

The personal field notes of Jean Cunningham revealed the first occurrence of Rock Wren on Quadra Island. The bird was observed singing from a rock bluff on 29 June 1990. On 22 July 2000, Doug Innes observed the first occurrence of Rock Wren at Dove Creek near Courtenay. The bird was seen singing at the base of a rocky hill amongst a pile of logging slash. The most recent observation of Rock Wren, and the second-most northerly record on Vancouver Island is from Russel Creek, just south of Woss. The bird was observed in a 3-year old clearcut by Michael and Joanna Preston on 17 June 2003, singing from remnant boulders after road-blasting.

Records of Rock Wren in coastal British Columbia are uncommon and sporadic, especially away from the southern mainland and to the north. Prevalence of this species on coastal islands has likely increased as a result of an increasing number of observers and the availability of suitable yet temporary habitats as a result of logging.

Throughout its North American range, populations have declined at an average annual rate of 1.4% for the period 1966-1996 (Lowther et al. 2000). In British Columbia specific trends are unknown although populations appear stable at well-known sites in the southern interior.

Acknowledgements

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About the Author

Mike is presently enrolled in a M.Sc. program in the Department of Biological Sciences at Simon Fraser University and is manager of the Wildlife Data Centre.