

LATE NESTING OF BEWICK'S WREN IN NORTH AMERICA

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Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) is present year-round throughout its range in western North America that extends from extreme southwestern British Columbia to southern Mexico (Kennedy and White 1997). In British Columbia, the species is resident, and breeds, along southeastern Vancouver Island, the southern Canadian Gulf Islands, the southern Sunshine Coast (rarely), and commonly throughout the lower Fraser River valley to Hope (Campbell et al. 1997). Recently small numbers have been recorded in the southern Okanagan valley (D. Brown pers. comm.).

On 25 August 2008 I noticed an adult Bewick's Wren enter a crevice in the lattice side of a sheltered woodpile in my back yard (Figure 1) with what appeared to be nesting material in its bill. Since this seemed to be an unusually late date to initiate breeding I watched the site from the kitchen window, as time permitted, over the next several days. During that short period both adults were preoccupied with nest-building activities which ceased on 29 August. I assumed that nest construction had been completed



Figure 1. The backyard wood pile where a pair of Bewick's Wrens built a nest in late summer and successfully fledged a family in early autumn. Cadboro Bay, BC. 7 October 2008 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3654a.

and perhaps egg-laying had commenced. Over the following week I did not examine the site, knowing that if incubation had started the species could abandon its nest. Meanwhile, the male sang full and partial songs infrequently during the day at various locations in the backyard. On 6 September, when I noticed that the female had left the woodpile to feed, I quickly checked the site and located a nest wedged between pieces of lumber and 32 cm lengths of cut logs. The site felt surprisingly warm and dry and probably provided good insulative cover. The nest contained three eggs (Figure 2). On 10 September the female left the nest as I approached the woodpile to confirm the clutch size. It still contained three eggs.

The eggs hatched on 16 September as both adults were watched flying into the woodpile with food in their bills. Feeding activities continued throughout daylight hours. It was difficult to identify food items because the adults rarely stopped before entering the nest site. However, spiders (Family Arachnida) and beetles (Family Coleoptera) were observed. Also, much foraging time was spent on the ground below a suet feeder hung under the eaves of a 2.4 m storage shed which was only 4.5 m from the nest site. It appeared that fallen seeds and bits of suet and raisins were being gathered and fed to the nestlings.



Figure 2. Autumn nest and eggs of Bewick's Wren. The top log was shifted slightly to obtain the photograph. Cadboro Bay, BC. 12 September 2008 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3654b.

The nest was checked on 25 September with a flashlight and three large nestlings were found. Their body-feathers were well developed and sheaths covered about one-third the length of the feather shaft suggesting they were about 10 days old (see Kennedy and White 1997). Feeding activities continued by both parents until 30 September when an adult was observed feeding two newly fledged young on the ground under the suet feeder. At 0730 hrs the following morning, on 1 October, the third fledgling was spotted in the same location being fed by an adult.

The family seemed to disappear afterwards although the male Bewick's Wren sang incomplete songs intermittently from the tops of small trees over the next few weeks. On 19 October and 10 November an adult (presumably the parent female), accompanied by two "mottled" young, were spotted feeding again on crumbs on the ground that had fallen from the suet feeder.

In British Columbia, extreme dates for nests containing eggs range from 17 March to 15 July and nestlings have been recorded from 5 April to 5 August (Campbell et al. 1990). This 142-day nesting period includes second broods (see Pearse 1957). The Cadboro Bay nest extends the egg period by 45 days and the nestling period by 52 days for the province. Kennedy and White (1997) give latest egg dates for North America as the end of June and young dates as the third week in August.

The possibility exists that what I observed may have been a third nesting. Although most Bewick's Wren pairs rear a single brood per season, a pair successfully reared three broods in a season in Oklahoma (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992).

September 2008 was an above average month for the Victoria area with daytime temperatures ranging between 11.6 °C and 23.9 °C and nighttime temperatures between 6.2 °C and 13.2 °C. Rain for the month was 7.0 mm, well below average (see <http://www.vicweather.net/reports/NM-SEP08.TXT>). Mild weather conditions may have contributed to successful fledging.

Late nesting by Bewick's Wren in Cadboro Bay may not be an isolated event. Three years earlier, on 5 September 2005, another nest was discovered tucked in the corner of a carport in a neighbour's yard less

than 50 m from the 2008 nest site. It contained five eggs that appeared abandoned on 8 September. The eggs disappeared two days later. Human disturbance and neighbourhood cats were cited as possible causes.

Literature Cited

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