

MARSH WREN

Cistothorus palustris

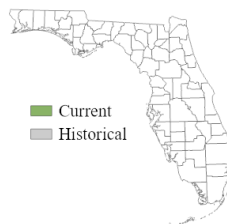
Order: Passeriformes

Family: Troglodytidae

FNAI Ranks: G5/SNR

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none



Description: Small wrens with prominent white stripe above eye; plain, unstreaked crown; and black triangle on back streaked with white. Marian’s marsh wren has a dark cinnamon-brown head, neck, and upper back; dark brown wings, rump, tail, and lower back; and underparts shaded with brown. Worthington’s marsh wren is grayer overall, with grayish-brown upperparts and pale grayish underparts. Northern subspecies of marsh wrens are richer in color with chestnut browns and tans.

Similar Species: Sedge wren (*Cistothorus platensis*) may be confused with marsh wren in winter, but is smaller, shorter-billed, and has streaked crown and inconspicuous buffy eye stripe.

Habitat: Inhabits tidal marshes dominated by smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) on the Atlantic coast and by black needlerush (*Juncus roemerianus*) on the Gulf coast. Prefers taller vegetation found along tidal creeks.

Seasonal Occurrence: Permanent residents. Individuals from migratory northern subspecies winter in interior and coastal marshes throughout Florida.

Florida Distribution: Similar in distribution to north Florida seaside sparrows (*Ammodramus maritimus*; see species account), Worthington’s marsh wren occurs in salt marshes from the St. Mary’s River/Cumberland Sound (Nassau County) to just north of the St. Johns River (Duval County) (formerly south to New Smyrna, Volusia County). Marian’s marsh wren breeds in Gulf coast marshes from Port Richey, Pasco County (formerly to upper Old Tampa Bay), to Franklin County; nesting season records from the mouth of the Apalachicola River and St. Vincent Island (Franklin County) and upper Escambia Bay and Garcon Point region of Santa Rosa County.

Range-wide Distribution: Worthington's marsh wren ranges north to South Carolina. Marian's marsh wren continues westward to southwestern Alabama.

Conservation Status: Atlantic coast subspecies (Worthington's) appears stable, although its range is much reduced. Like the seaside sparrow, their absence from seemingly suitable habitat south of the St. Johns River is cause for continued monitoring. Nassau County, home to the majority of the Atlantic coast population, has very little marsh in state or federal ownership. In Duval County, Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve and Pumpkin Hill Creek State Buffer Preserve encompass some wren habitat. Much of Marian's marsh wren habitat fronting the Gulf coast between Pasco and Franklin counties is under state or federal ownership. Status less well known west of Wakulla County. Coastal marshes are presumably better protected from dredge and fill activities than in previous years, although development of adjacent uplands may contribute to habitat degradation. Local, direct impacts may result from bridge and dock building. Like seaside sparrows, wrens are intolerant of significant invasion of woody vegetation into marsh habitat. Encroachment of mangroves in Volusia County marshes caused wrens to abandon this area.

Protection and Management: Manage to prevent pollution (e.g., oil spills, pesticides) and continue to monitor, including the sparser Panhandle population.

References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1994, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.



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