

## The King of Birds



# BTO

Looking out for birds

You would be forgiven for thinking that this is a rather grand title for such a tiny bird as the Wren. A very old legend goes that the birds of the earth wanted to choose one species as king and the Wren either cheated or was chosen because it sat on the back of a soaring eagle. There is a lot of folklore about this bird which goes back centuries and throughout history many stories have been written about it.

The Wren is considered to be under-recorded in gardens but although possibly present, it can be easily overlooked because of its diminutive size. It may be spotted flitting about nooks and crannies searching for insects and spiders. Its size and relatively long, pointed bill enable it to find insects which other birds are unable to reach. Often, it is the loud powerful song of the bird which belies its presence. It is a rather rotund brown bird and is usually recognised by its short erect tail. On closer inspection, you will see fine markings on its feathers and a faint pale line just above the eye.

It is in early spring that the male starts to establish territories. To attract a female, he may construct five or six nests ensuring they are positioned in places where dense undergrowth hides the nest from predators. The female then chooses in which nest to lay her eggs and does this by lining the chosen nest with feathers. Breeding will then commence. She will normally lay five to six eggs and may have two broods.

It is the small size of the Wren which makes it very vulnerable in winter as it chills more easily than larger birds. The winter of 1962/3 was a devastating year for Wrens but now, due to our milder winters, numbers are doing well. To help them through the winter, Wrens will roost in great numbers and a record of 61 in a single nest box has been recorded. They pile in on top of each other, their heads facing inwards and their tails outwards. Although many Wrens are resident in UK, a small number migrate over the North Sea from Scandinavia to spend winters here. How such small birds survive this journey is amazing.

If you see a Wren visiting your garden in winter, it may appreciate some tiny morsels of cheese, suet or seed to see it through the cold days and nights.

*Jean Parrott*

*Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you are interested in birds and other creatures which visit your garden, the scheme may be just for you. Contact Jean on [jpbirds@talktalk.net](mailto:jpbirds@talktalk.net) if you would like a free information pack or visit [www.bto.org/gbw](http://www.bto.org/gbw)*

*Wren by John Harding*

