Sedge Wren

Cistothorus platensis

As their name implies, breeding Sedge Wrens frequently reside in sedge marshes, the grassy margins of large wetlands, and wet meadows dominated by sedges, rushes, and grasses. While they may prefer relatively damp fields, these wrens are not necessarily restricted to these wet habitats. Breeding pairs also occupy upland pastures, hayfields, and fallow fields, frequently where grasses are interspersed with some weedy vegetation. They have also been recorded from clover and alfalfa hayfields.

Sedge Wrens have traditionally been very erratic summer residents in Ohio. They may be virtually absent during some years, while other years may produce defined movements with sightings from throughout the state. At most locations, they are present one year and absent the next. Even the timing of their appearance is unpredictable, and males may establish territories anytime between the second half of May and early August.

These fluctuating numbers masked long–term trends in their statewide populations. However, Sedge Wrens have probably declined during the 20th century. For example, Campbell (1968) cited declines in the Oak Openings area of Lucas County from 25 pairs in 1928–1932 to only one pair in 1947. In the northeastern counties, as many as 20 males were counted in the former Pymatuning Bog (Ashtabula County) and Solon Bog (Geauga County) during 1931–1932 (Aldrich 1934), but similar numbers have not been encountered subsequently. Additionally, Sedge Wrens were more widely distributed in Ohio during the 1920s and early 1930s than in recent years. Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from 35 counties, although they were very locally distributed with records from only 1–3 locations in each county. In the southern half of the state, he cited records from Belmont, Champaign, Darke, Franklin, Jackson, Licking, Muskingum, Perry, Pickaway, and Ross counties. On the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau, there were also records from Coshocton and Tuscarawas counties before 1935 and Carroll County in 1944 and 1946 (Buchanan 1980, Hicks 1937). In the southwestern counties, the first nests at Dayton and Cincinnati were found during 1937 and 1945 respectively (Kemsies and Randle 1953, Mathena et al. 1984).

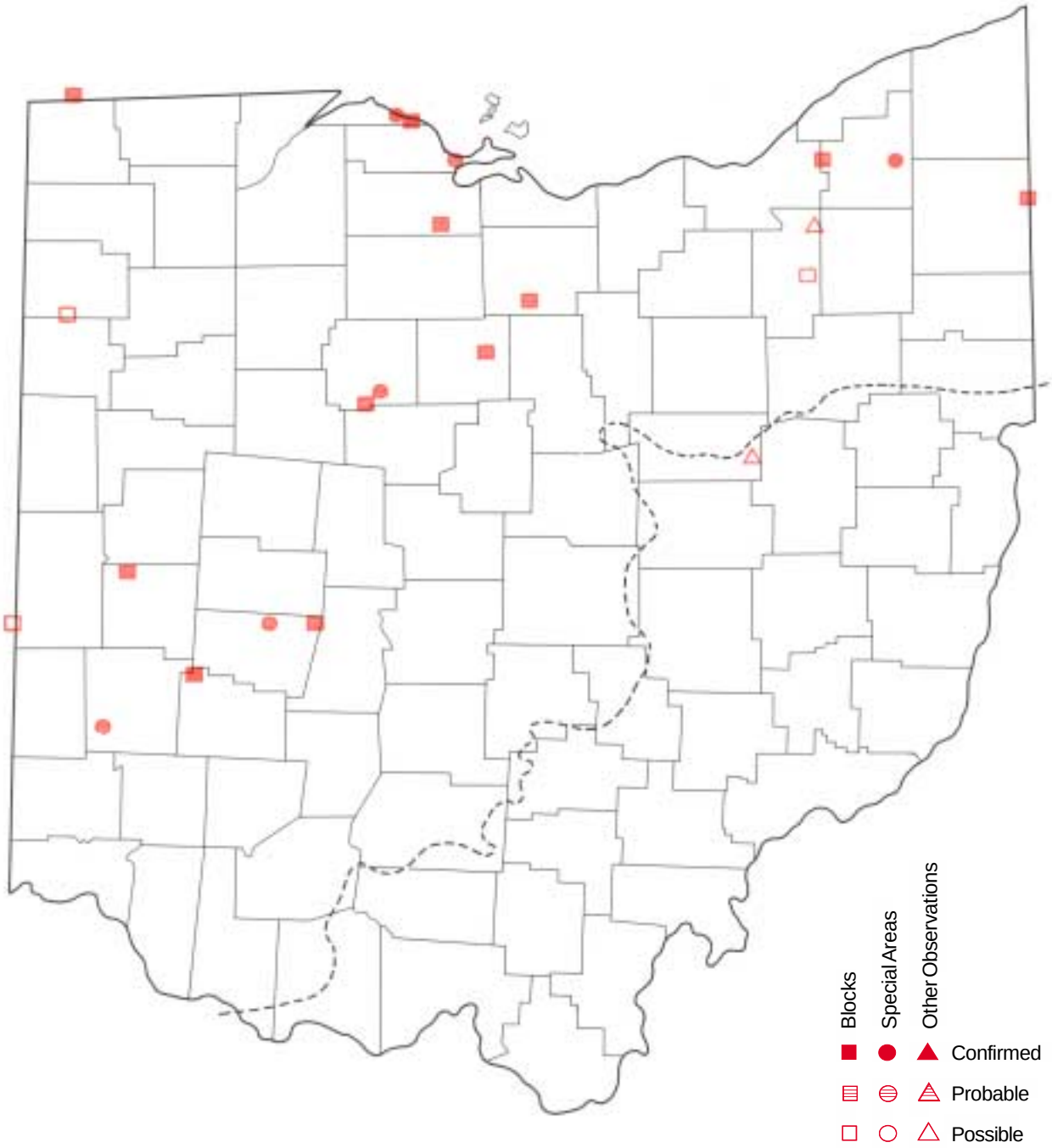
The Atlas Project produced records from a total of only 14 priority blocks, 6 special areas, and 2 other locations within 18 counties. Three of these records were near western Lake Erie in Ottawa and Lucas counties where small numbers were noted during each year of the project. However, every other location was occupied during only one or two years. These records were scattered across the Till Plain, Lake Plain, and Glaciated Plateau regions. Despite their absence during the Atlas Project, summering Sedge Wrens were recorded from the Illinoian Till Plain and Unglaciated Plateau regions earlier in the 1980s. Based on these reports, the statewide population of breeding Sedge Wrens appears to be very small, probably no more than 10–20 pairs annually. No noticeable movements extended into Ohio during the Atlas Project, and greater numbers of nesting pairs could be expected in the state during “flight years”.

Of the 22 Atlas records, breeding was confirmed at only four locations. Observations of active nests and recently fledged young produced these confirmed records. Territorial males at 13 locations were considered to be probable breeders, although some of these males may have been unmated. The five reports of possible breeders pertained to singing males that only briefly established territories and probably did not nest. Given the erratic migratory habits of this species, some of these probable breeders may have been migrants.

Tim Daniel - Division of Wildlife

Sedge Wrens will breed as isolated pairs and in small colonies. When their statewide populations were larger during the 1920s and 1930s, these colonies could be composed of 10–30 males (Hicks 1935). In recent years, most colonies have totalled six or fewer singing males (Peterjohn 1989a). Their nests are well hidden in clumps of dead or living grasses and sedges, usually at heights of less than 1.5 feet; and males regularly build “dummy nests” in addition to the one where their young will be raised.

There is a definite dichotomy to the Sedge Wren breeding season in Ohio. The early nesting season begins during the second half of May. Eggs may be produced during these weeks, since recently fledged young have been noted by June 15–21 (Campbell 1968, Hicks 1933a). However, most first clutches are laid by early June and the young wrens fledge by mid–July. The late breeding season begins between July 15 and August 5, and August clutches are not unusual. The latest reported clutch is September 9 (Campbell 1968). These young wrens normally fledge during late August and the first half of September.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	3	3.2	21.4	–
Till Plain	271	8	3.0	57.1	–
Ill. Till Plain	46	–	–	–	–
Glaciated Plateau	140	3	2.1	21.4	–
Unglaciated Plateau	212	–	–	–	–

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	**14**	**1.8%**
Confirmed	2	14.3%
Probable	9	64.3%
Possible	3	21.4%