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NATURE NOW

By Lydia King Frehse
 Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Winter Wren a Treat For Bird Watchers

WALLOON LAKE — In a forest filled with birds, most species are old friends, frequently seen and heard. However, in the course of years the bird watcher is bound to come upon the unusual.

In Northern Michigan the winter wren is such a bird. One is most likely to see it during the migration period in April or October. One springtime we found it along the Rouge River near Birmingham, cavorting around the roots of a tree undermined by the water. In summer it inhabits northern forests, but its favorite breeding grounds are in the isolated areas of the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains.

ON THIS MORNING at Walloon we first noticed a small dark brown object moving through the clintonia, gold-thread and fern that carpet the swampy terrain just beyond our back porch. Closer observation revealed it as a small bird, tiny tail upturned. Half-hidden in a hole in the ground, it looked more like a mouse.

As we observed it repeatedly going back and forth, its mouth filled with small insects, we identified it as the winter wren. Its trips were frequent, its destination always the same as it quietly crept under the back porch. A little detective work revealed that it went on under the cottage which rests on cement blocks. The obvious conclusion: this was the location of the nest filled with young.

OVERCOME WITH curiosity my husband was the first to edge his body underneath the timbers there to see the nest hidden on a joist. One by one each of us took his turn to look at the curious ball-like structure. It was made of small twigs held together with moss, with a side entrance not more than an inch in diameter. In the half-light we could see the hungry gaping mouth of only one of the young.

We were among the many bird students who had never seen the nest of a winter wren. The usual location is a recess in the upturned roots of a fallen tree or among fallen logs or in an old decayed stump.

Fur, feathers and hair make a warm lining for the nest which may contain from 4 to 8 creamy white eggs speckled with reddish-brown and lavender.

THE WINTER WREN which is just slightly more than four inches long is the smallest of its family which boasts 46 species and subspecies in North America. Except for the golden-crowned kinglet and the ruby-throated hummingbird, it is the smallest of our avian friends. The color is a richer brown than that of the house wren while the lighter underparts are barred with dark brown.

Although the song of the winter wren was heard by our daughter who arrived ten days ago, we missed this treat. Many call it more beautiful than that of the thrushes, its rapid and varied warbling notes interspersed with several high and prolonged trills. Since the song lasts as much as eight seconds and is frequently repeated, at times it seems almost continuous. Although it may be heard from March to late July, it is at its best when delivered from some mountain retreat during the courting season.

WHEN THE English naturalist Thomas Nuttall described the voice of the winter wren, he gave it scant praise. Later ornithologists concluded that he must have heard only its call or its alarm notes.

If you are on vacation in the northeastern United States look for the winter wren and do not mistake it for a mouse as it creeps secretly across the ground cover.

Do you have any unwanted articles of furniture? Turn them into cash with a "quick result" Eccentric classified ad.

Record Population Growth in Michigan

EAST LANSING — Michigan's population has risen by almost 1.5 million persons to 7,795,182 in the last 10 years, according to latest U.S. Census Bureau figures.

"Never in the history of this state have so many new residents been added in a single decade," writes sociologist Dr. John F. Thadden in the July-August issue of the Michigan Economic Record, published by the bureau of business and economic research of Michigan state university.

Most of the change was due to excess of births over deaths rather than in-migration, according to the M.S.U. professor.

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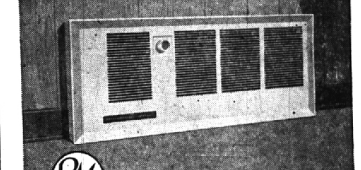
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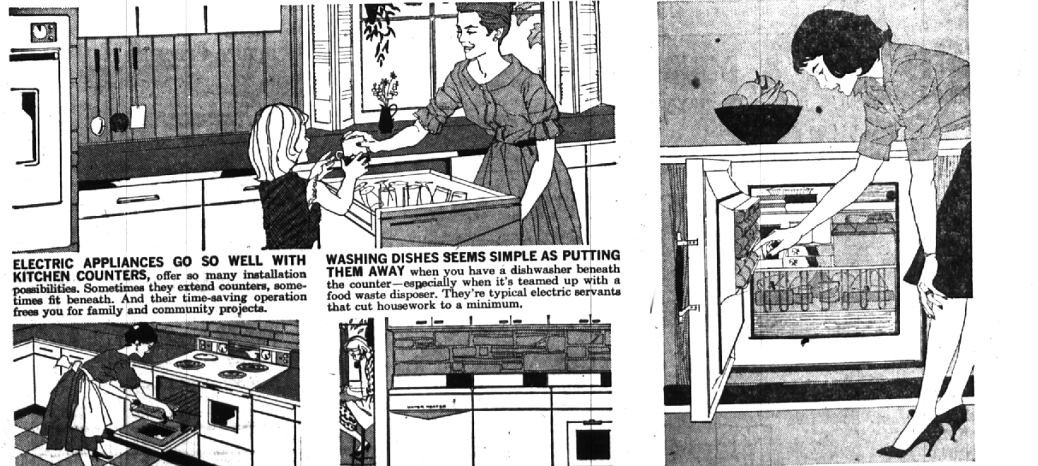
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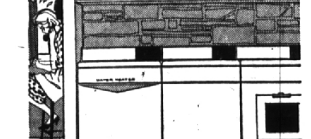


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