

LONG-BILLED MARSH WREN SINGS AGAIN IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

By STEPHEN SYPHAX

EARLIER IN THIS CENTURY, Long-billed Marsh Wrens flourished in the emergent marshes along the tidal Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. By 1950, practically all of the Anacostia tidal marshes within the District of Columbia were dredged or filled. No doubt, the loss of the emergent marshes, the type of habitat the wren requires, is why it has not been seen or heard in the past 30-40 years in the Kenilworth Marsh (figure 1), part of the Anacostia River wetland.

In a report entitled "Birds of the Washington, D.C., Region (Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington, March 25, 1929), May Thacher Cooke wrote that Long-billed Marsh Wrens were an "abundant summer resident in the marshes along the Potomac River and Eastern Branch [Anacostia River]". In 1944, Dr. Frances M. Uhler of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service authored a report examining bird life in the Anacostia Marshes. In that report, he commented, "under the golden canopy of the flowering wildrice the mid-summer air rings with cheery call of scores of marsh wrens." Most of the marsh land about which Dr. Uhler made that important observation, and many others, was destroyed when it was used as the city dump during the 1960s.

RESTORING THE MARSH

In 1992-93, National Capital Parks-East worked with the Washington, D.C. Government, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments, and others, on the restoration of Kenilworth Marsh in northeastern, Washington, D.C. (See the *Park Science* cover article for volume 15(1)). During that cooperative venture, approximately 32 acres of emergent marsh land

were reconstructed in a tidal lagoon that had previously been domi-



Figure 1. Absent for at least 30 years, the marsh wren staged a comeback last summer at Kenilworth Marsh, a recently restored wetland along the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C.

nated by exposed mud flats at low tide. Following the reconstruction, a 5-year monitoring program (begun in 1993) was established to look at wildlife utilization, plant biodiversity, and nutrient reduction. If all goes well with the Kenilworth project, the information from the monitoring efforts will be applied toward other marsh reconstruction projects along the Anacostia River (e.g., Kingman Lake—a NPS site downriver of Kenilworth Marsh).

One of the components of the 5-year monitoring program is a breeding bird census (mapping technique for documenting breeding songbirds). Using this technique, year one, two, and three found Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Yellowthroats, and Tree Swallows breeding in the reconstructed marsh. This year (1996) marked the long-awaited return of the Long-billed Marsh Wren to the marshes of the Anacostia River-Kenilworth Marsh!

Natural Resource Specialist Dan Roddy, who has been leading wildlife utilization investigations at Kenilworth

Marsh, has been waiting for this day ever since he began the monitoring efforts 4 years ago. Roddy says it has been exciting to see blackbirds, swallows, and yellowthroats attracted once again to the "new marsh", especially knowing the history of the Anacostia River and the many changes it has gone through. However, the Long-billed Marsh Wren might be the best indicator of the success of the reconstruction of Kenilworth Marsh, and real fulfillment would not occur until its return.

This past June, after 4 years of looking, listening, and mapping, Roddy finally heard his first Long-billed Marsh Wren in the Kenilworth Marsh. He observed 3 males establishing territories in sections of the reconstructed marsh. Within 2 weeks of that observation, Roddy saw his first Swamp Sparrow and Willow Flycatcher, also new to the restoration area, demonstrating territorial behavior in the rebuilt marsh.

Although the park continues to have its challenges in the reconstructed Kenilworth Marsh (i.e., exotic plant management), the return of the Long-billed Marsh Wren (and other species) is clearly a positive indicator and may indicate (from a wildlife standpoint) proceeding with current plans for reconstructing another tidal marsh at the nearby Kingman Lake in 1997.



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