# HOUSE WREN BREEDS IN CLIFF SWALLOW NEST

BRUCE ELLIOTT, California Department of Fish and Game, 2201 Garden Road, Monterey, California 93940

On 25 June 1983 I observed a Northern House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) feeding an undetermined number of nestlings in a nest of a Cliff Swallow (*Hirundo pyrrhonota*). The nest was located under the Bradley Road Bridge spanning the Salinas River in southern Monterey County, California, and was approximately 20-25 m above the river bank. Two additional swallow nests, one active, were immediately adjacent to the one used by the wren. Approximately 300 other active swallow nests were on the outer border of the bridge, separated from direct view of the wren nest by a lateral support beam.

I observed the wren for about 45 minutes foraging repeatedly in exotic weedy vegetation in the shade under the bridge. It would periodically return to the nest with food.

Northern House Wrens are cavity nesters. The vast majority of their nest sites are natural crevices in trees or posts, cavities developed by other bird species for their own nesting requirements, or man-made birdhouses. However, House Wrens are known to utilize every kind of suitable aperture from hollow gourds to pockets of clothing hanging in buildings (Bent, A.C., U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 195, 1948). Although Bent does refer to one occurrence of a House Wren nesting in a Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) burrow, I have been unable to locate any reference to use of Cliff Swallow mud-gourd nests by any wren species. In addition, the height of the nest above ground level is well above the usual upper height limit of 3 m for House Wren nests. Bent (ibid.) lists one nest in a dead yellow pine stub 50 m above ground, but also states that " . . . heights of 20 to 30 feet are unusual." Thus, the Bradley Bridge nest is unusual for its structure and its elevation and emphasizes the plasticity of the House Wren's behavior in selecting a nest site.
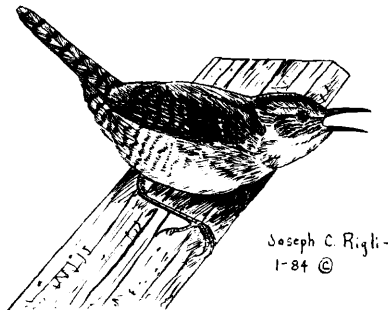
House Wren      *Sketch by Joseph C. Rigli*