



This scarecrow is called home

Bek. Mt. News. 12 Nov. '81

by cactus wren

by Nancy Laizure

My husband laughed at me when I told him what I was going to do. My friends and relatives told me it was just a waste of time.

"Everyone knows scarecrows don't keep the birds away," they said. Refusing to listen to everyone's advice, my children and I set out last spring to build a scarecrow.

A couple of boards as a frame and some old clothes were all we needed. We stuffed the pants with weeds and grasses from the property. The shirt was stuffed with some polyester used in making quilts.

We planted him in the vegetable garden to guard our spring crops. He looked so real standing there, I just knew he would work. But then I noticed the new seedlings were being nipped off at ground level, just like before, and I had to cover the seedlings with screen.

Over the summer we did not plant a garden, but Charley kept his faithful vigil while the sun beat down on him.

This fall, while preparing the garden, I decided Charley needed a new shirt. As I began unbuttoning his shirt I noticed some grass sticking out above the top button, and I remembered that I had not stuffed Charley's shirt with grass.

The little hole in the center of the neatly-wound grass told me a cactus wren had befriended Charley and decided the inside of his shirt would make a wonderful home. So my scarecrow had become a bird house!

The cactus wren is our state bird and is a year-round resident in our desert. He is a very curious bird and seems to be very intelligent.

Research with cactus wrens has disclosed that they build both roosting and breeding nests. Both the male and female wrens have their own individual roosting nests in which they sleep. The nests may be very

close in the same shrub or in separate shrubs.

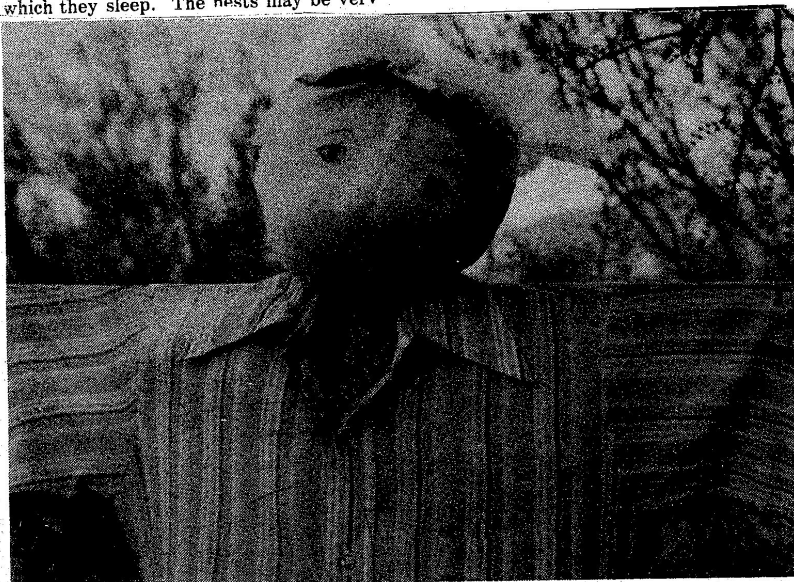
It is not known why the cactus wren physiologically needs this roosting nest while other species of birds do not need a covered nest for sleeping. The adult wrens occupy their roosting nests year-round.

In the spring, the male and female wrens begin constructing a breeding nest. It is thought that the female chooses the site. Both male and female can be seen diligently working side by side building the nursery for their young.

After the nest is completed and the female is incubating her eggs, the male begins constructing other nests near the breeding nest. These are called secondary nests. These are occupied by the male, by the female as a roosting nest when her young are hatched and the breeding nest becomes too crowded, or as a temporary nest for the young birds as they begin to go out on their own.

There is no evidence that a cactus wren builds a decoy nest. Either he or one of his family uses the secondary nests at one time or another. After the female raises her first brood, she may move into a secondary nest to lay her next clutch of eggs or she may take over her partner's roosting nest for this purpose. The male may then take over another secondary nest for himself or cheerfully go about building a new roosting nest.

Cactus wrens build their nests in cholla cacti, in crotches of saguaro and in palo verde trees. The jumping cholla seems to be a favorite nesting site. At the present time, on our property, there are wren nests in a prickly pear, a saguaro, a cat-claw vine in our carport, and of course, inside Charley's nice warm shirt. Sorry Charley, no new shirt for you!



This scarecrow is called home by a cactus wren