

= Eurasian wryneck =

The Eurasian wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*) is a species of wryneck in the woodpecker family . This species mainly breeds in temperate regions of Europe and Asia . Most populations are migratory , wintering in tropical Africa and in southern Asia from Iran to the Indian Subcontinent , but some are resident in northwestern Africa . It is a bird of open countryside , woodland and orchards .

Eurasian wrynecks measure about 16 @. @ 5 cm (6 @. @ 5 in) in length and have bills shorter and less dagger @-@ like than those of other woodpeckers . Their upperparts are barred and mottled in shades of pale brown with rufous and blackish bars and wider black streaks . Their underparts are cream speckled and spotted with brown . Their chief prey is ants and other insects , which they find in decaying wood or on the ground . The eggs are white as is the case with many birds that nest in holes and a clutch of seven to ten eggs is laid during May and June .

These birds get their English name from their ability to turn their heads through almost 180 degrees . When disturbed at the nest , they use this snake @-@ like head twisting and hissing as a threat display . This odd behaviour led to their use in witchcraft , hence to put a " jinx " on someone .

= = Taxonomy and etymology = =

The Eurasian wryneck was first described by Carl Linnaeus in the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae* in 1758 . The type species came from Sweden .

The genus name *Jynx* is from the Ancient Greek name for this bird , *iunx* . The specific *torquilla* is Medieval Latin derived from *torquere* , to twist , referring to the strange snake @-@ head movements . The bird was used as a charm to bring back an errant lover , the bird being tied to a piece of string and whirled around . The English " wryneck " refers to the same twisting movement and was first recorded in 1585 .

The Picidae family has four subfamilies , the Picinae (woodpeckers) , the Picumninae (piculets) , the Jynginae (wrynecks) and the monotypic Nesotitinae (Antillean piculet) . Based on morphology and behaviour , the Picumninae was considered to be the sister clade of the Picinae . This has now been confirmed by phylogenetic analysis and the Jynginae are placed basal to the Picinae , Nesotitinae and Picumninae .

Jynginae includes one genus (*Jynx*) and two species , the Eurasian wryneck and the red @-@ throated wryneck (*Jynx ruficollis*) , resident in sub @-@ Saharan Africa . There are six subspecies of *Jynx torquilla* :

Jynx torquilla chinensis Hesse , 1911
Jynx torquilla himalayana Vaurie , 1959
Jynx torquilla mauretanica Rothschild , 1909
Jynx torquilla sarudnyi Loudon , 1912
Jynx torquilla torquilla Linnaeus , 1758
Jynx torquilla tschusii O. Kleinschmidt , 1907

= = Description = =

The Eurasian wryneck grows to about 17 cm (6 @. @ 7 in) in length . The subspecies *Jynx torquilla tschusii* weighs 26 to 50 g (0 @. @ 92 to 1 @. @ 76 oz) . It is a slim , elongated @-@ looking bird with a body shape more like a thrush than a woodpecker . The upperparts are barred and mottled in shades of pale brown with rufous and blackish bars and wider black streaks . The rump and upper tail coverts are grey with speckles and irregular bands of brown . The rounded tail is grey , speckled with brown , with faint bands of greyish @-@ brown and a few more clearly defined bands of brownish @-@ black . The cheeks and throat are buff barred with brown . The underparts are creamy white with brown markings shaped like arrow @-@ heads which are reduced to spots on the lower breast and belly . The flanks are buff with similar markings and the under @-@ tail coverts are buff with narrow brown bars . The primaries and secondaries are brown with rufous @-@ buff markings . The beak is brown , long and slender with a broad base and sharp tip . The irises are

hazel and the slender legs and feet are pale brown . The first and second toes are shorter than the others . The first and fourth toes point backwards and the second and third point forwards , a good arrangement for clinging to vertical surfaces .

The call of the Eurasian wryneck is a series of repeated harsh , shrill notes quee @-@ quee @-@ quee @-@ quee lasting for several seconds and is reminiscent of the voice of the lesser spotted woodpecker . Its alarm call is a short series of staccato " tuck " s and when disturbed on the nest it hisses .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The Eurasian wryneck has a palearctic distribution . The breeding range of the nominate subspecies includes all of Europe from Britain to the Urals . In the north it reaches the Arctic Circle and the range includes Spain in the southwest . In the south and east it intergrades with *J. t. tschusii* (smaller and more reddish brown) which is found in Corsica , Italy , Dalmatia and parts of the Balkans . *J. t. mauretanica* (also smaller than the nominate form , light , with whitish throat and breast) is resident in Algeria and Morocco and possibly also the Balearic Islands , Sardinia and parts of Sicily . *J. t. sarudnyi* (considerably paler than the nominate with fainter markings) occurs in the Urals and then in a wide strip of Asia through southern Siberia , Central Asia , including the north @-@ western Himalayas to the Pacific coast . *J. t. chinensis* breeds in eastern Siberia and northeastern and central China while *J. t. himalayana* breeds in Pakistan and the northwestern Himalayas . Eurasian wrynecks also inhabit the island of Sakhalin , Japan and the coastal areas of southern China .

The Eurasian wryneck is the only European woodpecker to undertake long distance migrations . The wintering area of European species is located south of the Sahara , in a wide strip across Africa extending from Senegal , Gambia and Sierra Leone in the west to Ethiopia in the east . Its southern limit extends to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon . The populations from West Asia use the same wintering areas . The Central and East Asian breeding birds winter in the Indian subcontinent or southern East Asia including southern Japan .

During the summer the bird is found in open countryside , parkland , gardens , orchards , heaths and hedgerows , especially where there are some old trees . It may also inhabit deciduous woodland and in Scandinavia it also occurs in coniferous forests .

= = Behaviour = =

The Eurasian wryneck sometimes forms small groups during migration and in its winter quarters but in the summer is usually found in pairs . It characteristically holds its head high with its beak pointing slightly upwards . A mutual display that occurs at any time of year involves two birds perched facing each other with their heads far back and beaks wide open , bobbing their heads up and down . Sometimes the head is allowed to slump sideways and hang limply . On other occasions , when excited , the head is shaken and twisted about violently . When disturbed on the nest or held in the hand , the neck contorts and twists in all directions . The bird sometimes feigns death and hangs limply with eyes closed .

On returning to the breeding area after migration , the birds set up territories . On farmland in Switzerland it has been found that old pear orchards with large numbers of ant nests are preferentially selected over other habitata . Areas used for vegetable cultivation provided useful habitat when they include areas of bare ground on which the birds can forage . Territories are not chosen at random as arriving birds favoured certain areas over others with the same territories being colonised first year after year . The presence of other Eurasian wrynecks in the vicinity is also a positive influence . Orchards in general , and older ones in particular , provide favoured territories , probably because the dense foliage is more likely to support high numbers of aphids and the ground beneath has scant vegetation cover , both of which factors increase the availability of ants , the birds ' main prey . Despite some territories being consistently chosen over others , reproductive success in these territories was no higher than in others . Limiting factors for such crevice @-@ nesting

species as Eurasian wrynecks are both the availability of nesting sites and the number of ants and their ease of discovery . Modern farming practices such as the removal of hedges , forest patches and isolated trees and the increasing use of fertilisers and pesticides are disadvantageous to such birds .

The diet of the Eurasian wryneck consists chiefly of ants but beetles and their larvae , moths , spiders and woodlice are also eaten . Although much time is spent in the upper branches of trees , the bird sometimes perches in low bushes and mostly forages on the ground , moving around with short hops with its tail held in a raised position . It can cling to tree trunks , often moving obliquely , and sometimes pressing its tail against the surface as a prop . It does not make holes in bark with its beak but picks up prey with a rapid extension and retraction of its tongue and it sometimes catches insects while on the wing . Its flight is rather slow and undulating .

= = Breeding = =

The nesting site is variable and may be in a pre-existing hole in a tree trunk , a crevice in a wall , a hole in a bank , a sand martin 's burrow or a nesting box . In its search for a safe , protected site out of reach of predators , it sometimes evicts a previous occupant , its eggs and nestlings . It uses no nesting material and a clutch of normally seven to ten eggs is laid (occasionally five , six , eleven or twelve) . The eggs average 20 mm by 15 mm (0.82 in x 0.61 in) and weigh about 2 g (0.007 oz) . They are a dull white colour and partially opaque . Both sexes are involved in incubation which takes twelve days , but the female plays the greater part . Both parents feed the chicks for about twenty days before they fledge . There is usually a single brood .

= = Status = =

The IUCN lists the Eurasian wryneck as being of " Least Concern " in its Red List of Threatened Species . This is because it has a world population estimated at up to fifteen million individual birds and a very wide geographical range . The population may be decreasing to a certain extent but not at such a rate as to make the bird reach the threshold for a more threatened category . In continental Europe , the largest populations are in Spain , Italy , Germany , Poland , Romania , Hungary , Belarus and Ukraine , and only in Romania is the population trend believed to be upward . In Russia , where there are believed to be 300,000 to 800,000 individuals , the population trend is unknown . In the United Kingdom the numbers of bird are on the decrease and it is protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and is listed on Appendix II of the Bern Convention . It is protected as a migratory species under the Birds Directive in the European Union .