

FEATURE ARTICLES

**THE ROLE OF FOOD, NEST PREDATION, AND CLIMATE IN TIMING OF  
WRENTIT REPRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES**

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*Abstract.* Timing of breeding activities by birds has important fitness consequences, as deciding when to nest can affect nest success. For three breeding seasons, we provided supplemental food to Wrentits (*chamaea fasciata*) inhabiting semiarid shrublands. We tested the effects of food supplementation on timing of initial egg laying, number of nests attempted, timing of fledging, and length of the breeding season. We also evaluated whether Wrentits timed nest initiation to avoid periods of greatest predation risk. Our study was conducted during a period of high interannual variation in precipitation. Supplemental food did not advance laying date in Wrentits. During a drought, even Wrentits given supplemental food delayed nesting, initiated fewer nesting attempts, fledged young earlier, and reduced the length of the breeding season. In a year of average rainfall, supplemental food allowed pairs to continue reneesting late into the summer, after repeated nest losses from predation. Wrentits did not time nesting to avoid periods of greatest predation risk. In timing initial breeding, Wrentits appeared to be responding to climatic conditions and to indirect cues that predicted environmental conditions later in the breeding season rather than to food availability at the time of egg laying.

*Key words:* breeding phenology, *Chamaea fasciata*, climate, food supplementation, nest initiation, reproductive timing, Wrentit.