



May 1900. *Osprey* 4(9): 138.

The Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*) in Eastern Nebraska.

By M.A. Carriker, Jr., Nebraska City, Neb.

The Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*) is an abundant summer resident of the eastern part of Nebraska, frequenting chiefly the timbered land along the Missouri River and the streams and creeks flowing into it.

It is almost impossible to tell when they arrive and when they leave; for the reason that many, breeding farther north, spend the winter here, and as they leave in the spring for their northern haunts more drift up from time to time from the south; so that never does there appear to be any decided movement.

I am convinced also, from the manner in which they obtain their food, that they do not make short stages, feeding as they go along, and whenever possible following the course of a stream.

During the late autumn and winter and early spring, before the breeding season, they are very noisy.

I am seldom in the woods during the above-mentioned season that I do not see a troop from three to six or seven flitting along in their peculiar jerky and halting manner, searching industriously along the tree trunks and limbs for the grubs hidden under the bark, while ever and anon, breaking forth in a crisp decided manner with "Chick-adee-dee-dee," sometimes clear and full, and again hurriedly running the syllables together, but ever with that cheerful and energetic tone which endears him to all birdlovers.

During the coldest part of the winter they remain hidden away in some wind-sheltered valley, covered with a thick growth of timber, but in the sunny days of November, March and April they seek out the apple orchards and in company with *Dryobates pubescens* and *D. villosus* devour great quantities of injurious grubs, and during the intervals of search, gathering in noisy groups, scolding in their accustomed manner at some avian intruder.

After the chilling blasts of winter are over and the sunny days commence in the latter part of February, March and April, they give voice to their delight in a manner which I have never observed in any other month of the year. It is a call very similar to that of *Sayornis phoebe* except that it is louder, clearer, and much more distinct, consisting of two clear sweet notes, pitched rather high; the second about a half tone lower than the first and both in a distinct minor key.

I never heard it in the late winter days, but that it sends a joyous thrill through me, awakening pleasant memories and giving rise to eager anticipations of spending many happy hours in the search for their nests. It is almost equal to being awakened some bright March morning by a Robin, pouring out in joyous abandon its sweet melody, as it sways back and forth on the topmost twig of a nearby tree, bathed in the first rays of the rising sun.

I always begin to look for their nests just about the time I have finished with *Buteo borealis* and have been getting full sets of *Corvus americanus* for a week or ten days; in other words; from the 15th of April to the 1st of May, according to weather conditions.

Introduction

Search

Browse Articles

Species List

Image Gallery

Copyright

In 1896 we had a very early spring and my first full set was taken April 18th, while in 1898 it was much later, May 15th.

They are more or less irregular in their breeding, owing to the straggling manner in which they make their arrival.

The length of time for getting first full sets ranges from fourteen to seventeen days, and I have never found sets later than this period, except of birds whose first sets I had good reason to believe had been taken. Thus my observations would tend to strengthen the belief that but one setting is deposited in a season, except where this is taken, when two and even three sets may be laid; but in this case the later sets are almost invariable small, seldom ever containing more than four or five eggs.

The nesting site is generally chosen near some stream or pond, but often in orchards quite distant from any water. Out of about fifty-seven nests observed during the past four seasons, there were but fourteen found any distance from water, none of these being in orchards, and the other five in heavy timber.

A dead stub of a willow tree is preferred, although the stubs of hickory, cottonwood, linden, and wild cherry are not infrequently made use of.

The highest nest found was 30 feet from the ground, the lowest 1 foot, while the average height is 8 feet.

I have never found them nesting in natural cavities in any tree except the apple and have no positive evidence of them ever using the cavities of any of the *Picidae*.

The cavity is from 1.25 inch to 1.75 inch in diameter at the entrance, widening downward to from 2.50 inch to 3.50 inch at the bottom, with an average depth of 6 inches.

The structure and material of the nests in this locality is almost invariable.

The nest is first formed with sides and bottom of fresh green moss, and then lined with soft hair of the rabbit, cow, horse or any other animal that may chance to leave its hair caught on fence or limb. The earlier in the season the nest is made the more hair is used in making it, with less of the moss, while those later are just the reverse; nests made for second sets are nearly always very frail.

From the data of forty-seven sets, the number of eggs in the set ranges as follows:

No. of Sets.	No. of Eggs in Set.
Seven	4
Ten	5
Nineteen	6
Eight	7
Two	8
One	9

This gives the average number of eggs to the set as six.

The female does not commence incubation until all of the eggs have been deposited, and until that time the eggs are kept covered with a layer of hair taken from the nest lining.

This hair is pushed to one side whenever an egg is deposited, which is daily, and afterwards replaced.

This may be taken as an infallible sign as to the completion of the set, unless the bird is flushed while laying, without having had time to replace the covering.

Incubation is completed in fourteen days, and during this time the female seldom leaves the nest being fed by the male. In many cases she has to be removed by force, especially when the incubation is advanced.

As in the case of all birds whose incubation is short, the young are soon fledged.

Transcriptions and editing copyright © 2004
James E. Ducey and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.
All rights reserved.
Files may not be copied or redistributed without permission.
Electronic Text Center
University of Nebraska Libraries

