

Boreal Chickadee

Poecile hudsonicus

The family *Paridae* (meaning "titmouse family") includes the closely related chickadees and titmice. Members of this family are small, acrobatic flyers, with black throats and dark caps. Males and females as well as adults and juveniles are all similar in plumage. Their common name, "chickadee," imitates the sounds of their distinctive vocalizations. While titmice do not occur in Alaska, four species of chickadees inhabit the 49th state: the Boreal Chickadee, Black-capped Chickadee, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and the Gray-headed Chickadee.

Formerly known as the Brown-capped Chickadee, the Boreal Chickadee is a small (14cm) species of the dense, boreal-coniferous and mixed coniferous-deciduous woodland. From a distance, these hardy little birds have short-wings, short-bills and a fluffy, rounded appearance. These chickadees are gray-brown above and whitish below with white cheeks, a black bib, and brown sides and flanks. They are distinguished from the Black-capped Chickadee by their brown rather than black cap.

The song of the Boreal Chickadee is a simple, clear trill with a short introductory note, "p-twee-tititititititi." Reminiscent of their common name, their hoarse and wheezy call is a nasal "tseek-a-day-day." Their scolding cries are heard immediately upon entering their territories, and these curious birds can easily be lured in closer for viewing by "pishing."



Boreal chickadee nests are built in tree cavities and lined with moss, fur, plant down, inner bark, or lichen. Both male and female excavate the nest (if an abandoned woodpecker excavation isn't used) but only the female builds the nest. The 4-9, 16-mm eggs are white, finely marked with reddish-browns. The male feeds the female on or near the cavity nest during the 11-16 day incubation period and is the primary food-provider for the young in the days following hatching. Fledglings leave the territory by 3 weeks post-hatching.

The diet of the Boreal Chickadee consists of seeds and insects gleaned from shrubs and tree bark. These active and agile birds often hang upside down from twigs to feed! Tame and friendly, these chickadees are easily attracted to birdfeeders.

These birds are winter residents of Alaska and Canada, though in some winters, small numbers wander hundreds of miles south of their normal eastern range in Canada. They form mixed-species winter flocks with other chickadees, kinglets and nuthatches and small woodpeckers.