

School-to-Nature



Black Capped Chickadee

The Black Capped Chickadee is a small, short-billed songbird with a black cap and throat. The cheeks are white and the chest is light brown. Wings and tail are darkish gray with white edges. Males and females look exactly the same. They are 5-6 inches long and their wingspan is 6-8 inches. They are very common in all of the northern U.S. and southern Canada, and you'll spot them easily at backyard feeders and on all Conservancy lands. You might first "see" a Chickadee by its call! The Chickadee makes at least 15 different calls, but the "chickadee-dee-dee" song gives the bird its name.

Chickadees live and nest in woods and bushy thickets. They eat large amounts of insect eggs, weevils, lice sawflies and other insects. They also feed on centipedes, snails, slugs and spiders. They are one of the most important pest exterminators in orchards and forests. They eat thistle seeds and bird seed mixtures from backyard feeders, especially black sunflower seeds. A chickadee will hide food in different spots in their territory and they will remember where they hid it for months. When hungry, they will go find the food they have hidden away. To keep warm in the winter, they fluff up their soft, thick feathers to trap warm air, and that serves as insulation from the cold.

These small birds build nests in holes in dead tree or rotten branches. The nest is made of coarse materials such as moss, and lined with soft fur. The female lays 6-8 white eggs that have small reddish-brown spots on them. Eggs hatch 12-13 days later, and chicks can leave the nest in 14-18 days.

Chickadees live and travel in small flocks that may even include other small birds such as finches or nuthatches, so that they are safer from predators. Chickadees are fun to watch at a bird feeder. They can be taught (with lots of patience) to eat from your hand!

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Caledonia Conservancy | P.O. Box 044714 | Racine, WI | 53404
262-498-4993 | www.CaledoniaConservancy.org