

Twenty-second in the Fuertes print series

[The original painting by Louis Agassiz Fuertes was reproduced in *Bird-Lore*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, January-February, 1916. The accompanying text, written originally by Frank M. Chapman is reprinted here with some updating. Habitats from A.O.U. Check-list, 6th Edition, 1983.]

Notes on the Plumage of North American Birds

Frank M. Chapman

The tameness of chickadees, their distinctive notes, the conspicuousness of their markings which show practically no variation in color with age, sex or season, combine to make them among the most easily recognizable of birds.

There is, however, considerable geographic variation among the various species of the genus (*Parus*), but, since all migrate but little, if at all, two races of the same species are not usually found associated.

Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus atricapillus*. Fig. 4). As in the other species of the genus, the sexes are alike in color. The winter plumage differs from that of summer only in being more richly colored, the buffy tints being deeper, while the grayish margins on the feathers of wings and tail are wider. The young bird, on leaving the nest in its juvenal plumage resembles its parents, but the black crown-cap is duller and the plumage somewhat more fluffy. But these slight differences disappear at the postjuvenal molt, after which the young bird cannot be distinguished from its parents.

The Black-capped Chickadee is found in tall thickets, deciduous or mixed deciduous-coniferous woodlands, open woodlands and residential suburbs and parks.

This species is resident over the greater part of North America from western and central Alaska east to Newfoundland, south to northwestern California, east to southern Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey through West Virginia, western Maryland and western Virginia to eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina.

Carolina Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis carolinensis*. Fig. 5) This species so closely resembles the Black-capped Chickadee that it might well be considered merely a race of it, however, the two kinds do intergrade. During the winter they may both be found in a narrow strip of territory at the northern limit of the range of the southern species and the southern limit of the range of the northern species. Under these circumstances, it requires a highly trained eye to distinguish these birds by the slight difference in their size and markings, the Carolina Chickadee being smaller and without whitish margins to the wing-coverts; but to one familiar with their notes field identification is possible.

The habitat that Carolina Chickadee inhabits is deciduous woodland, forest clearings and edge, swamps, thickets, second-growth woodland, parks and brushy areas.

Black-capped and Carolina chickadees do hybridize on a limited basis in their zones of contact in the middlewestern states of Kansas east to Illinois and in the Appalachians.

Mexican Chickadee (*Parus sclateri*. Fig. 3). This, the most southern of the chickadees, may be known by its dark gray sides and large black throat patch. No races of it have been described.

The habitat of the Mexican Chickadee is montane pine, spruce-fir and pine oak forests, primarily in mesic habitats.

This species is resident from southeastern Arizona, southwest to the Mexican highlands and to Veracruz.

Mountain Chickadee (*Parus gambeli gambeli*. Fig. 6). The white line over the eye at once distinguishes this chickadee.

The habitat of the Mountain Chickadee is montane coniferous forest, primarily pine, spruce-fir and locally pinyon-juniper. In nonbreeding season it also inhabits pine-oak and riparian woodlands.

This species ranges from northwestern British Columbia south and west to southern California, southern Nevada and Arizona, and New Mexico and west to extreme western Texas.

Alaska Chickadee now **Siberian Tit** and also known as **Grey-headed** or **Siberian Chickadee** (*Parus cinctus alascensis*. Fig. 1). This is an Alaskan form of a Siberian species, which resembles the Hudsonian (now Boreal) Chickadee, but is paler and has the sides of white instead of gray.

The Siberian Tit inhabits the boreal coniferous forest, primarily spruce, most commonly in stream basins, also locally in willow and aspen thickets.

Acadian Chickadee now **Boreal Chickadee** (*Parus hudsonicus littoralis*. Fig. 2). This species may be known by its brown crown, brownish back, and rusty sides, which are evident in the field. In the interior of Canada and northwest to Alaska, it is replaced by the closely allied race, *Parus hudsonicus hudsonicus*, a larger, somewhat more brightly colored race.

Boreal Chickadee inhabits boreal coniferous (primarily spruce) and mixed coniferous-deciduous woodland, rarely in deciduous thickets and woodland.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (*Parus rufescens*. Fig. 7) This distinguishing character of this species is expressed in its common name. Various races of this species have gradations of rusty on the flanks.

This species is resident in coniferous and mixed coniferous-deciduous forests, primarily in humid regions, less frequently in pine forest, oak woodland, pine-oak association and thickets.

This species ranges from southern Alaska western British Columbia, northern Idaho and Montana south through the coast ranges and to southern and central California.



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