

# Duration of Tufted-Titmouse Carolina Chickadee Pairings

Hervey Brackbill  
2623 Poplar Drive  
Baltimore, Maryland 21207

Color banding of Tufted Titmice (*Parus bicolor*) for 30 years and Carolina Chickadees (*P. carolinensis*) for 20 years at a windowsill feeding shelf in Maryland has yielded data on the duration of pair bonds in those species. From June 1955 to June 1985, in Larchmont, an outlying Baltimore suburb, I maintained the feeder year-round. Through 1975 I marked almost every pair that came to it, but for the next 10 years the titmice only. My home is adjacent to 5 ha of broadleaf woodland, chiefly oaks (*Quercus*), and the Larchmont community is itself well wooded similarly. The altitude is about 110 m.

Sexing the birds by size and behavior—male's wing always longer than his mate's, male dominant and feeds female, female alone develops brood patch—and distinguishing pairs by birds' steady association apart from others, by courtship feeding, and by attendance of fledglings—I followed the course of 33 titmouse and 12 chickadee pairings. A few pairs of each species were also watched at the nest.

Pairs sometimes separated out of fall groups and eventual mates were seen together just occasionally for a while before there was steady association. A pair was considered to have formed only with the steady association and to have ended when one of the members disappeared. Rematings of pair survivors could usually be very exactly timed.

*Tufted Titmouse.* Disappearance of the male ended 15 pairs, disappearance of the female ended 16; one bird of each sex was actually found dead, the others presumably died. Two other pairs disappeared as pairs. One of these was supplanted by new arrivals. The members of the other disappeared only six days apart; as the female had a brood patch at the time, it seems likely that this pair simply withdrew to a nesting territory.

The pair bonds lasted:

- 1-6 months — 9
- 7-11 months — 10
- 12-18 months — 9
- 26-½ months — 1
- 32-½ months — 1
- 40 months — 1

The supplanted birds had been paired for 9 months, and the ones that seemed to withdraw for at least 2 months.

Seasonally, the disappearances occurred:

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Males	4	2	—	3	2	—	—	—	—	2	1	1
Females	3	—	1	5	3	1	1	—	—	1	1	—

In contrast to the minority of lengthy pairings, a number of the birds had two to five mates in comparable periods. One male had two mates in 30 months; one had four in 32 months. One female had three mates in 18 months; one had three in 30 months; one had three in 40 months, and one had five in 52 months.

*Carolina Chickadee.* Disappearance of the male ended six pairings and disappearance of the female ended six. The bonds lasted:

- 2-6 months — 3
- 12-18 months — 4
- 21-½ months — 1
- 25-½ months — 1
- 30 months — 1
- 32 months — 1
- 53-½ months — 1

Dixon (1986) has reported on two other species of chickadee in which matings lasted through four breeding seasons: two pairs of Mountain (*P. gambeli*) and one pair of Black-capped (*P. atricapillus*).

Again, among my birds, there were contrasts with the long pairings. One male had two mates in 24-½ months, and one female had three mates in 46-½ months.

Seasonally, the disappearances occurred:

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Males	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	1	2	—	—
Females	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	2	—	1

*Summary.* Thus, 12 of 31 titmouse pairings (40 percent) and 9 of 12 chickadee pairings (66 percent) lasted one year or more. The titmouse maximum was 40 months; the chickadee maximum 53-½ months. In both species the sexes were equally responsible for the pairings' terminations.

## Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Keith Dixon for helpful comments on my first draft of this note.

## Literature Cited

Dixon, K.L. 1986. Lengthy pair bonds in Chickadees and Song Sparrows. *North American Bird Bander* 11:12-13.

# It's Raining Redpolls

**Tom Mutchler**  
RD 1, Box 210  
Forestburgh, NY 12777

In NABB 3:107, I wrote about banding at second story window feeders. I have two 2' x 3' feeders under my windows and have had surprising visits by Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*) in 1978 (66 banded) and in 1982 (286 banded), Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) in 1984 (12 banded) and in 1986 (9 banded) as well as Red-winged Blackbirds, Dark-eyed Juncos and Chipping Sparrows—birds that I would not have expected to see feeding at this level. In nine years I have banded 24 species in this manner.

Other than three birds unexpectedly trapped in the blizzard of 1982, the only experience I have had with Redpolls has been in fields in Easton, PA. where I watched these pretty creatures popping seeds as quickly as possible after snow storms. On 31 January 1987, a male Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) appeared on the feeder. As previously related, my feeders are above a parking lot of a lodge located in a forested area in the lower Catskill Mountains. I had seen flocks of from 30 to 100+ flying around the area but never expected to band any as I do not mist net because of the deer population.

By 5 February there were 52 on my feeder and I realized an invasion was underway. On 9 February two four-celled Potter Traps were opened. Eleven Redpolls were caught, measured, and banded. The traps have been opened daily since then from 8 AM to 5 PM after allowing the birds an hour to feed. I

keep the traps well supplied with "canary mix" which is mixed with golden millet and niger seed.

In order to empty the traps, it is necessary to have my upper torso out the window. One morning at 9 AM as I was emptying the traps with four Redpolls already in hand, checking for prior banding, a larger bird flew down and not only made a pass at the birds in my hand but hovered, somewhat, within inches of my hand and face. It flapped to the other feeder and then flew up to a tree, scolding me for stealing his breakfast. At first I thought it was a Blue Jay as it happened so quickly, but as it flapped up to the tree there was no doubt, it was a Cooper's Hawk.

A majority of the Redpolls were caught in the mornings but some did stray in in the afternoons when the competition from the Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) and Black-capped Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) allowed. A total of 133 Redpolls were banded by 12 March.

Just about every morning around 8 AM the Redpolls arrive and it does appear to be raining Redpolls for there are so many. At one time I counted more than 100 on and under the feeders. There seems to be a pattern to the feeding routine and trapping of the Redpolls occurs mainly in the morning, Evening Grosbeaks from 11-2, and the Chickadees all through the afternoon. From 10 February to 12 March, 78 Evening Grosbeaks and 37 Black-capped Chickadees were also banded.

## Correction

Pat Kehoe co-author of "More Rapid Wear of Bands on Common Goldeneye than on White-winged Scoter." Address was changed, but the correction was not received in time to appear on the article in issue 12:3. His new address is:

Pat Kehoe  
Fish and Wildlife Branch  
Dept. of Natural Resources & Energy  
Box 6000  
Fredericton, NB, E3B5H1