

General Field Notes

Will Cook

North Carolina Editor
418 Sharon Road
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
cwcook@acpub.duke.edu

Dennis M. Forsythe

South Carolina Editor
Department of Biology
The Citadel
Charleston, SC 29409
forsythed@citadel.edu
Fax: (803)-953-7084

Active Nest of the Black-Capped Chickadee from the Great Smoky Mountains: First Report for North Carolina

Douglas B. McNair

Tall Timbers Research Station
13093 Henry Beadel Drive
Tallahassee, Florida 32312-0918

On 21 June 1972 J. T. Tanner (field journals; in possession of Mrs. J. T. Tanner) discovered an active nest of the Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) in North Carolina on the Noland Divide Trail in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The nest site was about 0.8 km from the Newfound Gap Road, 1.6 km from the Tennessee - North Carolina state line. The elevation at the nest site was about 1770 m. The nest site was a 2.3 m tall stub, 23 cm in diameter; the cavity entrance was 0.6 m from the top. Tanner watched both adults carry food to nestlings.

Simpson (1977) stated a nest of the Black-capped Chickadee had yet to be found in North Carolina and that a personal communication from Tanner indicated he had not found a nest in the state. Prior to his death, Tanner (pers. comm.) informed me that he did not consider a single nest record of resident Black-capped Chickadees at a high elevation in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina to be of paramount importance because of his earlier discoveries of nests in Tennessee (Tanner 1952). Tanner (pers. comm.) intended to collect more information on breeding Black-capped Chickadees before publishing another paper.

In the southern Appalachians, morphological and vocalization data of confirmed nesting Black-capped and Carolina (*P. carolinensis*) chickadees must be obtained along an altitudinal transect in habitats at different elevations to assess the distinctiveness of these chickadee taxa (see Robbins *et al.* 1986), which apparently are not sister taxa (A.O.U. 1998:464). The Great Smoky Mountains is the only range in Tennessee and North Carolina where a detailed study has been conducted that satisfies these criteria so that the contact zone (around 915 m) between Black-capped and Carolina chickadees was well defined (Tanner 1952). Tanner did not provide a description of the chickadees

he identified as Black-capped along the Noland Divide Trail, but his expertise on both Black-capped and Carolina chickadees in the southern Appalachian Mountains and the location of the birds and nest far above the contact zone in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park indicate his identification was correct. Consequently, the nest record of Tanner is the first evidence of breeding of Black-capped Chickadees in North Carolina (see Nicholson and McNair 1997 for a summary of nest records in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee).

Acknowledgments

I thank Mrs. J. T. Tanner for sending me copies of relevant field notes from the journals of J. T. Tanner and for graciously answering my queries. I also thank H. E. LeGrand, Jr., C. P. Nicholson, M. B. Robbins, and M. H. Tove for comments on the manuscript.

Literature Cited

- American Ornithologists' Union. 1998. Check-list of North American birds. 7th edition. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Nicholson, C P, and D B McNair. 1997. Black-capped Chickadee. Pages 217-219 in *The breeding birds of Tennessee* by C. P. Nicholson. University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville.
- Robbins, M B, M J Braun, and E A Tobey. 1986. Morphological and vocal variation across a contact zone between the chickadee *Parus atricapillus* and *P. carolinensis*. *Auk* 103:655-666.
- Simpson, M B, Jr. 1977. The Black-capped Chickadee in the southern Blue Ridge Mountain province: a review of its ecology and distribution. *Chat* 41:79-86.
- Tanner, J T. 1952. Black-capped and Carolina chickadees in the southern Appalachian Mountains. *Auk* 69:407-424.