

## **A Tufted Titmouse Nest Attended by Carolina Chickadees**

JAMES O. PULLMAN  
Route 2, Box 68, Chapel Hill, N.C.

20 September 1969

In late April 1969 I found two nests under construction on Morgan Creek at the Mason Farm near Chapel Hill, N.C. Carolina Chickadees were building in an overhanging stub about 4 feet above the water, while Tufted Titmice were carrying nesting material into a natural cavity in a beech tree 30 feet downstream.

I next visited the site on 17 May and, as expected, found the titmice delivering food to their young, whose cries were quite audible. The chickadee nest was inactive having, apparently, failed. I was surprised however to see a chickadee delivering food to the titmouse nest!

Further observation on this date, and again three days later, showed the following. Two titmice (presumably a pair) delivered food to the nest. There were two chickadees in the vicinity, but I could not prove that more than one of them brought food. I watched as 10 fecal sacs were removed from the nest, all by titmice. If the chickadees assisted in feeding the young, they apparently did not contribute to "housekeeping."

The frequency of nest visits by the two species was about equal, but their behavior in approaching the nest was quite different. The titmice generally flew directly to a perch in front of the nest hole, while the chickadees approached by degrees, often pausing at two intermediate points.

When the two species met at the nest, the titmice were clearly dominant; but in a number of such episodes, I never saw a vigorous conflict. The titmice, typically, would deliver a mild threat. The chickadee would then retire to a distance of about 15 feet, to return immediately when the titmouse had departed. Strangely, the presence of an observer seemed of much greater concern to the chickadees than the titmice. The former often settled over my head and scolded me while the latter were largely oblivious to my presence.

On 21 May after observing the nest for 90 minutes, I saw for the first time two immature titmice at the entrance of the nest hole. Fifteen minutes later, at 7:30 PM, one flew from the nest to a perch 20 feet away. Three more left at 7:40, 7:47 and 7:48 respectively. The parents had been absent as the first two of the young departed, but then returned and showed great excitement during the remainder of the episode, giving calls and flying beside the young.

Several minutes later, a chickadee entered the nest with food, but emerged with same and flew to a perch 2 feet away. He then repeated the performance twice again, perch to nest to perch to nest, until a titmouse appeared and drove him off.

It would have been interesting to see if the chickadees continued to feed the young titmice outside the nest, but darkness was approaching. I saw one chickadee pass within 2 feet of a titmouse with no exchange of food. Again, a chickadee approached, but was this time driven off by an adult titmouse. However the chickadees were clearly carrying food, and were clearly circulating around the young titmice, not in the vicinity of the nest.

My next opportunity to visit the nest site came on the morning of 25 May, when I found neither species near the nest.

Circumstantial evidence would suggest that, when the chickadee nest failed, the parental drives of the chickadees were transferred to the benefit of the nearby titmouse nestlings.