



Local Nestbox Users | Chickadees

IDENTIFICATION



Photo: Sean McCann (CC by 2.0)



Photo: Mdf (GNU FDL 1.2)

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Poecile rufescens

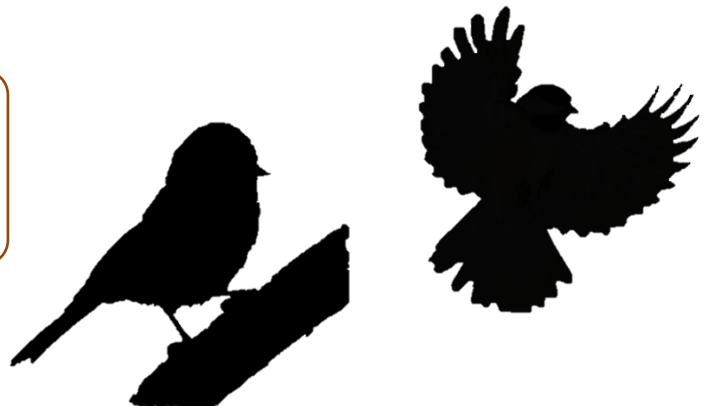
- Found on Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands, and mainland
- Black head and throat
- White cheek
- Chestnut back
- Grey belly with chestnut sides
- 4.75 inches long

Black-capped Chickadee

Poecile rufescens

- Common on mainland, absent from Vancouver Island
- Black head and throat
- White cheek
- Grey back
- White belly with buffy sides
- 5.25 inches long

Chickadees have a large, round head, small bill, and long tail relative to their small body. In flight, their wings take on a rounded shape.



BEHAVIOUR

Chickadees are agile little birds that are often seen hopping between branches and turning upside down as they forage in the tree canopy.

Chickadees can be very vocal. Chestnut-backed chickadees have a brief, raspy “chick-a-dee” call, whereas Black-capped Chickadees have a clear, extended “chick-a-dee-dee-dee” call.

Chickadees are resident year-round. In the winter, they form mixed-species flocks with other small songbirds like nuthatches. The chickadee’s diet is made up of insects, seeds, and berries.



HABITAT

Chickadees can be found in a variety of habitats, from moist, coniferous forests to oak woodland. They can also be found in backyards and city parks, as long as sufficient shrub and tree cover is available. The Chestnut-backed Chickadee is the only species of chickadee found on Vancouver Island. Where their ranges overlap on the mainland, Black-capped and Chestnut-backed Chickadees coexist by occupying different parts of the canopy: Chestnut-backed Chickadees will primarily forage high in the canopy and in conifers, whereas Black-capped Chickadees tend to feed lower down, in the shrubby forest understory and in deciduous trees, such as oaks.

NESTING

On the coast, chickadees breed from March to July, using cavities in trees and stumps or nestboxes for their nests. They can excavate their own cavity from soft wood although they will also use cavities formed by tree decay or woodpeckers.

Nests are made of a moss bed lined with soft materials like hair, wool, plant down, and fur from animals like rabbits and deer. The nests can vary in total depth and amount of material used as lining.

Chickadees will nest 1-2 times each spring. Each nest contains a clutch of 1-9 small white eggs with red-brown speckles.

These native species are protected under federal law and should not be disturbed—do not open nestboxes or remove nests during nesting season.



Photos: J Daly, GOERTS (left); Ruth Rutledge (right)

Learn more about chickadees, see photos, hear their calls, and more at Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s All About Birds (www.allaboutbirds.org/guide).