

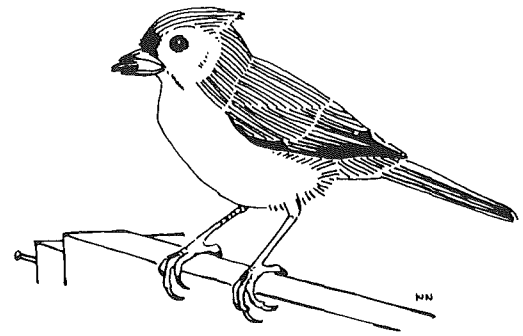
Tufted Titmouse

Parus bicolor

The Tufted Titmouse, like a number of other primarily southern species, has considerably extended its range northward in the last 50 years. Eaton (1914) mentioned only one breeding record for the entire state of New York. Forbush (1929) stated that titmice occurred casually in central New York and Connecticut and that there were no satisfactory records for Vermont. The species' prodigious spread has been well documented in New England since 1963 through the Massachusetts Audubon Society's annual Cardinal-Tufted Titmouse Survey. This February census has shown significant increases in the winter titmouse population in Vermont: from 1972 to 1978, fewer than 50 were reported annually, except for 1975, when the count was 160; between 1979 and 1983 Vermont titmouse reports have averaged 144 annually (Massachusetts Audubon Society 1972-83; RVB, Winter 1972-83). Audubon Christmas Bird Count totals for Vermont reflect a similar pattern, with fewer than 10 titmice per season recorded before the winter of 1978-79, except in 1974-75 when three counts reported a total of 52. From 1978-79 to 1982-83, an average of 70 titmice were reported on the basis of eleven counts (CBC 1974-83).

The expansion of the Tufted Titmouse's range has recently extended northward into southern Maine, central New Hampshire, and Vermont, and westward to southern Ontario, central Michigan, and Wisconsin. Within this range the species is still increasing in numbers; it continues to expand northward. Tufted Titmice are uncommon in Vermont, and breeding is restricted to river valleys in the southern part of the state. Tufted Titmice appear to have entered Vermont through the Connecticut and Hudson river drainages.

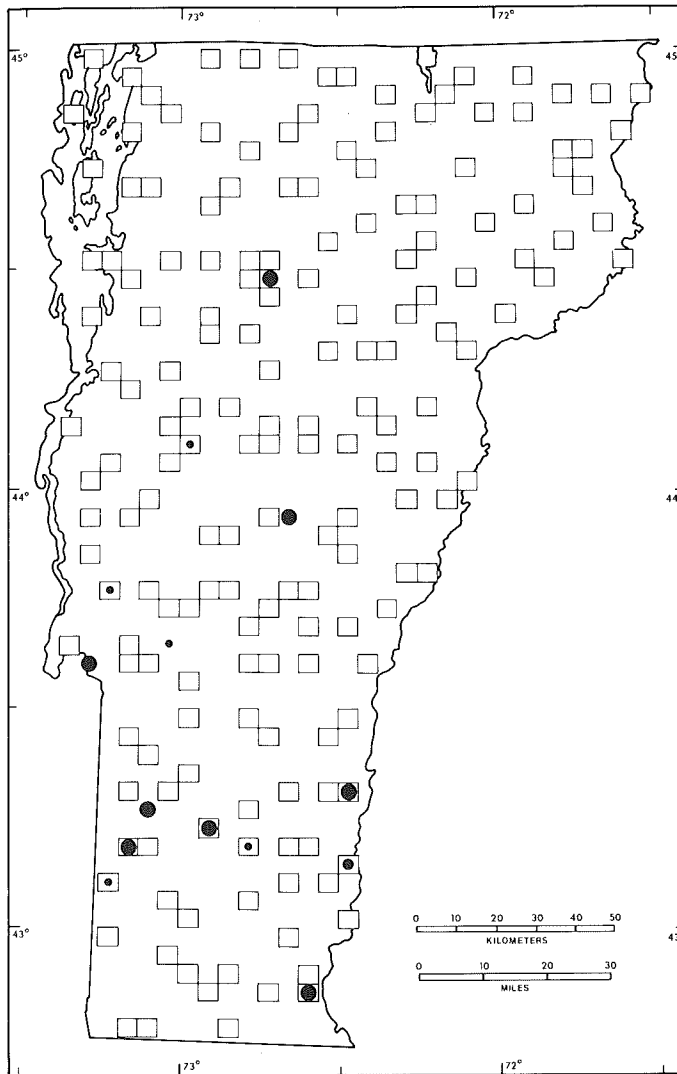
Titmice inhabit deciduous forest, riparian woodland, and residential areas. Of 7 Atlas Project Vermont confirmations, 4 were in village locales where yards or gardens bordered on mixed deciduous woodlands; 2



were near houses surrounded by mixed hardwoods and evergreens; and 1 was in open farm country with a nearby woodland. Titmice keep to the woods more than Black-capped Chickadees do, and are heard more often than seen. They are conspicuous when they come to feeders for sunflower seeds, suet, and peanut butter, and have been reported as far north as Burlington, Plainfield, and St. Johnsbury (Ellison 1981).

The first Vermont breeding report for the species was obtained in 1975, when adults feeding young were observed in Dorset (C. Earle, pers. comm.). During the Atlas Project breeding was reported throughout the southern two-thirds of the state. Atlas Project confirmations include nest building in Peru in June 1976 (ASR, L. Williams); adults feeding three young in Stowe in June 1979 (ASR, C. Schultz); recently fledged young in Brattleboro from July 8 to 16, 1980 (ASR, J. Prouty); four young being fed by adults on July 11, 1980 in Randolph (ASR, E. W. Clapp); nest building in Springfield on April 4, 1981 (ASR, E. W. Weeks); a pair nesting in a birdhouse, which was first reported on May 8, 1981, and whose young were heard on May 18 in Fair Haven (ASR, E. P. Allen).

Tufted Titmouse nests are built 0.9-2.7 m (3-9 ft) above the ground in natural cavities such as tree hollows and abandoned woodpecker holes. Artificial cavities such as nest boxes, metal pipes, and tin cylinder-shaped mail boxes are occasionally used (Laskey 1957). The nest is built mainly by the female and takes from 6 to 11 days to complete (Brackbill 1970). It is composed of mosses, dried grasses, rootlets, dead leaves, and strips of bark fiber, and is padded with



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 9 (5%)

Possible breeding: 4 (44.5% of total)

Probable breeding: 1 (11.0% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 4 (44.5% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	0	0	0
Green Mountains	3	5	33.3
North Central	0	0	0
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	3	19	33.3
Eastern Foothills	3	13	33.3

hair, fur, wool, and string; snake skins are also commonly used. Five to 6, occasionally 4 to 7, eggs are laid. Incubation is performed solely by the female and lasts for 13 to 14 days. One brood is produced each year. The young climb out of the nest in 17 to 18 days. Both parents feed the young; Tufted Titmice are most easily detected during feeding periods. Fledglings are often brought to feeders by their parents. The young may remain with their parents throughout the winter in small family groups.

The Tufted Titmouse is primarily a forest bird, although it may wander into more open areas before and after the nesting sea-

son (Beddall 1963). In Vermont, titmice separate from winter flocks in March and April and become retiring during the early stages of the nesting season.

WHITNEY NICHOLS