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Tufted Titmouse *Parus bicolor*

The Tufted Titmouse is a familiar visitor to feeders and a common breeding bird throughout the Panhandle and much of peninsular Florida. Tufted Titmice breed from eastern Mexico north to Nebraska and the Great Lakes and throughout the eastern United States from Maine to Florida.

Habitat. Tufted Titmice are found in a variety of wooded habitats, such as cypress swamps, pine flatwoods, and hardwood hammocks. It also occurs in many residential areas with sufficient tree cover. In May 1991 George Meyer found small numbers of Tufted Titmice in the extensive black mangrove forests of mainland Monroe County, which is somewhat surprising.

The Tufted Titmouse typically builds its nest in a natural tree cavity or an abandoned woodpecker hole. However, it readily accepts nesting boxes for breeding. An unusual Florida nest site was in a hanging clothespin bag (G. Bretz, pers. obs.). After a site is selected, the cavity is lined with a variety of materials, including moss, grass, and leaves. The nest cup is lined with finer materials, such as fur, hair, string, and plant fibers (Harrison 1975). Three to 6 eggs are laid (Stevenson and Anderson 1994) and incubated solely by the female. The eggs are white and finely spotted with shades of brown. Incubation takes 12 to 13 days, and the young fledge in 15 to 16 days (Harrison 1978).



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Seasonal Occurrence. Stevenson and Anderson (1994) report that, although the Tufted Titmouse is not normally regarded as a migratory species, it has been found south of its breeding range a number of times between fall and spring in Florida.

Nesting extends from 11 March to 7 June (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). This species is probably largely single-brooded in Florida as it is in the rest of its range (Brackbill 1970, Grubb and Provosudov 1994). Late broods are usually evidence of re-nesting after failure.

Status. The Tufted Titmouse is highly visible because of its gregarious nature, visits to bird feeders, and its loud clear "peter-peter-peter" song. These factors, along with the bird's quick response to recorded *Eastern Screech Owl* calls, make the Tufted Titmouse easy to locate.

As shown on the Atlas map, the Tufted Titmouse breeds over most of the northern two-thirds of the state but is conspicuously absent from much of the southeastern peninsula. Like most other land birds, Tufted Titmice have not colonized the Florida Keys. The southeast coast is heavily urbanized, and the western portions of Palm Beach, Broward, and Dade counties lack suitable breeding habitat for Tufted Titmice. However, it is difficult to explain the lack of birds in Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin counties, and the counties bordering Charlotte Harbor. But apparently these gaps have always existed, because Howell (1932) and Sprunt (1954) also mention them.

Greg Bretz

Tufted Titmouse

