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#### THE CARE AND FEEDING OF CHICKADEES

From our backyard experiences we regard Black-capped Chickadees as gregarious and friendly birds that chatter a lot while they eat sunflower seed and suet. If you watch a feeder closely, you should soon notice that the same birds return day after day -- a bent, broken, or missing primary; a characteristic gesture; or a preferred "hammering post" help to identify individuals.

But what if the food were to be taken away? A study in the winter of 1968-69 by Edward Mueller of Boston University (*The Auk*, 90, 3, July, 1973) shows that chickadees abandon an empty feeder within about two days. When the food was restored after three days, the birds returned at nearly the same rate as they left.

Mr. Mueller's two feeders were set up about 600 feet apart, and it became clear that certain birds preferred one station over the other. For example, when the food was removed from Station 1, only about half of its feeding population moved to Station 2. It seems that although chickadees maintain bounded wintering ranges, certain birds will freely switch. Mr. Mueller remarks, "All the evidence in this study indicated that the relations between birds and space was at the individual level ... We never noted a sudden influx of many outsiders, as though a flock of visitors had acted in unison in abandoning its regular range."

Finally, chickadees are indeed friendly. Aggressive encounters between birds were found to be low, not only within a foraging band, but toward visitors that may have joined in the unending search for sunflower seeds and suet.

L.J.R.



BOHEMIAN WAXWING, THE GLADES, NORTH SCITUATE, 2 NOVEMBER 1975  
Photographed by Bruce A. Sorrie