

**KILLING OF TUFTED TITMOUSE NESTLINGS  
BY A RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER**

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In March 2005 we placed two identically sized wooden nest boxes (15 × 14 cm with a 5.5 cm hole 21 cm from the bottom) 3.5 and 3.8 meters high, one on a slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) and one on a laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), 10.4 meters apart, in the backyard of a single family home in a subdivision in suburban Orange County, Florida. We monitored the boxes by using a ladder and opening the hinged top of each. On 12 April 2005, we observed an adult Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*) in one of the boxes, and an Eastern Screech-Owl (*Megascops asio*) in the other. Two weeks later titmice were observed visiting the first box and feeding nestlings. A look inside the box on 3 May 2005 showed at least five young, looking fully feathered.

Three days later, on 6 May 2005, we and the home-owner observed a commotion at the box from the house, with a titmouse clinging to the entrance hole. On reaching the foot of the tree we saw a young titmouse on the ground, which then flew uncertainly to a bush. Thinking that fledglings were emerging, we stayed to watch. At that point, a male Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) flew from the box. We placed the young titmouse high at a fork of a tree. As we returned to the house to continue watching, a second fledgling flew from the ground to a tree.

We watched over the course of another hour, during which time the woodpecker returned repeatedly to the box, calling and removing feathers from the nest. It also went to the box with the Eastern Screech-Owl, which contained three nestlings, and tapped at the entrance hole, but did not go in. The first fledgling titmouse eventually flew higher into a tree.

On 10 May 2005 we again examined the box and two young titmice were found dead inside, each with puncture holes in its head. The titmice were not harmed by the owls that occupied the other box the entire time the titmice were incubating and feeding the young.

Shackelford et al. (2000) and Hazler et al. (2004) report the Red-bellied Woodpecker as a predator of many animals but they did not report predation of Tufted Titmouse.

LITERATURE CITED

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- SHACKELFORD, C. E., R. E. BROWN, AND R. N. CONNER. 2000. Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*). In A. Poole and F. Gill (eds.). *The Birds of North America*, No. 500. The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.