

# WHO ARE THOSE GUYS IN THE BLACK HATS?

They're black-capped chickadees, of course. Here's everything you need to know about them

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## Where will you find black-capped chickadees?

The black-capped chickadee is found from coast to coast in Canada, and in the southern parts of the N.W.T. and the Yukon. They are also common in the northern half of the United States. Our teacher, Mrs. Hodge, told us that she used to see black-capped chickadees in northern Manitoba in the black spruce trees.

## What habitat do black-capped chickadees like?

A habitat is where an animal lives. It is a place where it can find food, water, a safe place to rest and a good place for breeding and raising a family. Black-capped chickadees prefer to live in leafy woods and mixed woods with leafy and coniferous trees. They are also found in open woods, like parks and suburban areas.

## How do black-capped chickadees build their nests?

Black-capped chickadees are "cavity nesters." That means they pick knot-holes in rotted parts of trees to build their homes.

Both male and female birds remove debris and woodchips from the knothole and place them far away from the nest. This helps avoid attracting other types of birds. Chickadees will dig out several knotholes before selecting the one they will use as a nest.

Their nests take about four or five days to complete. Inside the knothole, the female chickadee will build a foundation. She will use moss and other materials, including plant down, feathers from other birds, animal fur and insect cocoons.



## Trees for black-capped chickadees

Black-capped chickadees like both deciduous trees and coniferous trees. Deciduous trees lose their leaves in winter. Coniferous trees keep theirs. The lists here give examples of both kinds of trees.

- ★ **Deciduous trees**  
paper birch, beech, willow, oak, maple, dogwood, hazelnut, walnut
- ★ **Coniferous trees**  
pine, cedar, fir, spruce, hemlock





## What do black-capped chickadees eat?

Chickadees eat insects, snails and seeds. They really like insects—especially caterpillars—which are a large part of their diet in summer.

To find food, chickadees go into trees and hop from branch to branch chasing insects. Sometimes they will hang upside down or hover, or even make short flights to catch insects in the air. They will also swoop down on the ground to search for insects or other animals like snails and grubs.

In winter, seeds and berries become more important to the chickadee diet, but chickadees can still find insect eggs and pupae (often in cocoons) in trees, shrubs and fallen logs. If you have a birdfeeder, black-capped chickadees really like little black-oil sunflower seeds. A bird will take a seed in its beak and fly from the feeder to the tree, where it will hammer the seed on a branch to open it.

Black-capped chickadees also commonly store their food—mostly seeds, but sometimes insects also—in various sites such as bark, dead leaves, clusters of conifer needles and knotholes.



### Seeds and berries that black-capped chickadees eat

- ★ sunflower
- ★ pine seeds
- ★ poison ivy berries
- ★ milkweed
- ★ goldenrod
- ★ ragweed
- ★ bayberry



### FROM THE WILD TEAM: Feed the chickadees

We bet you already know how to identify a black-capped chickadee when you see one. But there's a simple way to see even more of them, especially in winter: make a feeding station in your yard. Try some of the ideas here and you'll attract all kinds of birds—black-capped chickadees included.

#### Make suet cake

Insect-eating birds like chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers love to get some extra fat in their diet when the weather gets colder. Suet cake hits the spot—and it's easy to make. All you need are bird seeds, like sunflower seeds, a foil tray and some patience

Keep your foil tray near the stove, so that you can pour pan drippings from cooking into it whenever you have some. (Be sure to ask a grown-up for help. Pan drippings are hot.) Add in seeds every time you add drippings. When your tray is full and the pan drippings harden, you have an excellent treat for birds. You can even keep your suet cake in the refrigerator until it's time to give it to your feathered friends. It will last for months.

#### Make a simple feeder

Building a bird feeder doesn't have to be difficult. It can be as easy as hanging a pine cone covered in suet from a tree. Or you can fill an old mesh onion bag with suet and tie it to a tree trunk. Bark-clinging birds

like woodpeckers will love it. If you want to get a little fancier, ask your parents to help you drill holes in a log, then fill the holes with suet and hang the log from a tree branch.

#### Make a backyard buffet

Nobody likes to eat the same food every day, and birds are no different. Try offering your birds a variety of foods, such as unshelled peanuts, millet, cracked grains and sunflower seeds. Also, remember that many birds love berries that grow in the winter. Ask your parents if you can grow plants like serviceberry, hawthorn or buffaloberry in your yard.

#### Some final tips

Remember, when you feed birds, they'll start to count on you. Be sure to keep feeding them through the winter. Make sure any birdfeeders you have are always well stocked, especially when the weather gets really cold. Also, when it snows, be sure to brush off your feeder. The birds won't be able to get at the food if it's covered in snow. 🐦