

Chestnut-backed Chickadees by Rebecca Lexa

Winter has sent many of our area's songbirds south to escape the chill. However, one of our most cheerful year-round residents is the chestnut-backed chickadee. These active, multi-colored birds are a frequent sight at feeders and in yards, as well as in more remote areas. They often may be found near juncos and other small songbirds, twittering and flitting through tree branches and underbrush in search of food.

The chestnut-backed chickadee is easy to identify. A small, round bird only a few inches long, it has the characteristic black cap and throat patch of the chickadees in general, and a soft grayish-brown chest. Look for the bright rust-colored back and sides that give it its name! The small, conical beak also helps to make this bird stand out compared to those with more robust beaks. During warmer months these chickadees eat many insects, but during winter they rely more heavily on seeds and berries, as well as seeds and suet in feeders.

If you'd like to help chestnut-backed chickadees year-round, start by making your yard more bird-friendly! While feeders help, planting native plants in the spring promotes more insects than non-native plants, which offers these birds and their young more crucial food. Chestnut-backed chickadees are cavity nesters, so if you can leave standing dead trees on your property woodpeckers and other animals will open up the sorts of cavities these little birds need. Consider hanging nest boxes, especially if you don't have any other suitable nesting habitat.