



## Oak Titmouse

### Coloring Instructions:

Dark gray - crest, crown, nape, back,  
wings, rump, tail, bill and legs

Light gray - face, throat, breast,  
sides and belly

Black - eye

# Oak Titmouse

**Length:** 5 "

**Habitat:** Common but overlooked resident in oak woodlands

**Field marks:** Small, gray tree bird with a prominent gray crest

This small bird is a classic example of what birders call "LGBs" (Little Gray Birds). The Oak Titmouse is the plainest, least colorful bird you will learn about this year. It is not raucous like a jay nor does it fly prominently about like a Turkey Vulture. But it is one of the most common birds in our area. Once you learn to identify it, you will see them everywhere.

Look for a small gray bird with a pointed crest on the top of its head; these are its main field marks. Since it spends most of its time on the branches of trees, it is hard to see in the summer when the branches are hidden by leaves. As the leaves fall, you will notice these year-round residents more easily.

Many small birds move slowly through trees searching for insects - especially in the summer when insects are abundant. Ornithologists are

fascinated by how so many species of birds can feed on the insects in trees. You would think that they get in each other's way. But they don't.

Some species search the leaves; others search the bark. Nuthatches walk down the tree trunk headfirst, so they see down the trunk. This way they find and catch insects that other birds overlook. Some birds search in the upper part of trees; others search the lower part of trees. Some spend most of the time searching the trunk; others, like the titmice, spend most of their time searching the outer tips of the branches. You must be little and lightweight to hunt on the outer tips of branches.

Each species specializes in a way that reduces the competition with other species. Each species has its own **niche**, its own way of making a living. Many species might have the same range and live in the same habitat, even within the same tree, but each species has a different niche within that habitat. Each searches for food in a slightly different place in a slightly different way.

The fact that so many birds are feeding in trees shows us how many insects are living in the trees. The trees need these birds; they help keep the number of insects under control. In one experiment, a tree was covered with a net that allowed insects in but kept birds out. Within a few years, the tree was dead because too many insects could now live and feed on the tree.

# Oak Titmouse Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- See an Oak Titmouse. The male and female look alike.
- Watch titmice forage in the branches.
- See a titmouse eat the white berries of poison oak, a favorite food of the titmouse.
- Hear and identify its clear, loud song in late winter. The Oak Titmouse is one of the first singers in our region. You will hear it singing in early February when most other birds are still quiet.

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