

CHICKADEE STORY

Black capped chickadees live in Minnesota all year long unlike many other species which migrate to separate summer and winter habitats. Black capped chickadees are some of the most common birds seen in Minnesota year round.

Black capped chickadees and other birds have many different calls and sounds that they make to communicate with one another. Calls serve many purposes including attracting mates, marking territory, warning of danger, and locating other birds. Since chickadees form flocks in the winter time, each flock might have slightly unique calls to communicate. This is similar to humans having different languages to talk to one another.

Chickadees have many behavioral and physical adaptations that help them to survive the long winter in Minnesota. In order to stay warm, chickadees will fluff out their feathers on cold days to trap air inside of the spaces between those feathers. This allows that air to heat up and keep them warm. Have you ever put on a cold mitten before? It takes a bit of time for the heat from your hand to heat up that space inside the mitten, just like the chickadees heat up the air trapped by its feathers. Chickadees also eat a lot more food in the winter time to build up energy that can be used to heat their tiny bodies. Chickadees don't have much space to store energy, so they will eat up to 10% of their body weight in a single day. These feathered wonders will also "cache" or store food in hiding places to come back to eat later.

Chickadees also have some interesting things happening with their body temperatures and heart rate in the winter. When they are cold, their heart rate can increase to 600 beats per minute! For comparison, an average heart rate for humans is between 60-100 beats per minute. The chickadee's blood vessels will shrink when it is cold outside, meaning that the heart needs to work harder to keep that warm blood circulating throughout the bird's body. At night when the chickadees are resting their body temperature will decrease by as much as 20 degrees to conserve what little heat and energy they can store.

When winter starts to fade into spring, the chickadees will begin to form their nests. Black capped chickadees usually begin nesting in April. Chickadees are cavity nesters, meaning that they will find a tree and create a small hole in it to lay their eggs. Check out the pictures down below for a visual. The photo on the left looks at a cutaway section of a tree, giving a sneak peek at the inside where a nest would be out of view. The photo on the right shows a chickadee clearing out space in a tree for its nest.



Photo Source: <https://nestwatch.org/learn/focal-species/black-capped-chickadee/>