

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES EATING GIANT RAGWEED SEEDS

ERIK KIVIAT

On 6 October 1980 I saw several Black-capped Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) eating seeds of Giant Ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*) at my home in the Town of Fishkill, Dutchess County. I had seen chickadees in the ragweed plants during the preceding few days, but it was not until the 6th that I verified the identity of their food. I again watched chickadees eating the ragweed seeds on 14 October. On both days the birds persistently flew back and forth between nearby trees and the five ragweed plants, removing seeds from the fruit clusters and also picking up seeds that had fallen on the concrete steps of the house. On 18 October I examined the ragweed plants and found very few seeds remaining; two seeds I collected measured 8-10 mm long including the 1-2 mm spines on the tops of the seeds. I suspect the birds hammered the seeds open rather than swallowing them whole.

Allen (1934) noted in a popular book that Black-capped Chickadees ate Giant Ragweed seeds. Martin *et al.* (1961, pp. 137-140) state that ragweed (species?) is a minor food of the Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees and the Tufted Titmice, but also note (pp. 420-421) that while the Common Ragweed (*A. artemisiifolia*) and Western Ragweed (*A. psilostachya*) are major wildlife food plants, ". . . the giant ragweed . . . of the East is of little value. Its seeds are large and have a tough coat which is the probable reason why birds use it so little." Giant Ragweed was not listed as a food of any parid by Bent (1964), and Odum (1941, 1941a, 1942) and Weed (1898) did not mention it as a food of the Black-capped Chickadee.

Giant Ragweed grows to six (!) meters tall in "alluvium, rich openings and waste places" throughout much of the coterminous United States and southernmost Canada (Fernald, 1950, p. 1469). In the Northeast, Giant Ragweed occurs on river banks, tidal river wetlands, roadsides, and areas of disturbed soil. Judging from the persistence of the birds I observed, Giant Ragweed could be a significant local food of the Black-capped Chickadee in New York and elsewhere.

LITERATURE CITED

Allen, A. A. 1934. *American Bird Biographies*. Comstock Publishing Co., Ithaca. 238 pp.

- Bent, A. C. 1964. Life histories of North American jays, crows and titmice. Dover Publications, New York. 495 pp., 68 plates, 2 vols. Reprint of *U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull.* 191, 1946.
- Fernald, M. L. 1950. *Gray's Manual of Botany*. Eighth Ed. American Book Co., New York. 1632 pp.
- Martin, A. C., H. S. Zim and A. L. Nelson. 1961. *American Wildlife and Plants; a Guide to Wildlife Food Habits*. Dover Publications, New York. 500 pp. Originally published 1951, McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- Odum, E. P. 1941. Annual cycle of the Black-capped Chickadee-1. *Auk*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 314-333.
- Odum, E. P. 1941a. Annual cycle of the Black-capped Chickadee-2. *Auk*, vol. 58, no. 4, pp. 518-535.
- Odum, E. P. 1942. Annual cycle of the Black-capped Chickadee-3. *Auk*, vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 499-531.
- Weed, C. M. 1898. The winter food of the chickadee. *New Hampshire Coll. Agric. Exp. Sta. Bull.* 54, pp. 85-98.

Hudsonia, Bard College, Annandale, New York 12504

CORRIGENDUM

Highlights of the Summer Season, Vol. XXXI, No. 4 Fall 1981 erred in listing Osprey as a breeding bird in Region 9. Also, the status of the Red-shouldered Hawk in Region 9 has been downgraded from "Confirmed" as a breeder to "Probable." These corrections were pointed out by the Region 9 Atlas Coordinator, Berna Weissman.