

Great Tits nest in McHenry County

by Darlene Fiske



Great Tit at a feeder in McHenry County backyard. 23 May 2003. Photos by Darlene Fiske.

At the beginning of May 2003, friends, Bo and Ginny McConnell, who live between Alden and Harvard, Illinois in McHenry County called me about a strange bird in their yard. The next day a friend from Spring Grove, nearby, told me of a bird at her feeders the previous weekend that sounded very much the same. Lo and behold another friend who lives near Alden told me of a similar bird! Then Bo stopped by my house to show me his diagram of the bird described as “chickadee sized... but somewhat more slender with a black cap and bib. BUT the bib ran into a wide black band all the way down the center of the breast. And the breast was olive-green shading to yellowish. Back the same color but even more dependent on the way the sun struck it. Wings brownish with tan wingbars.”

I knew from trips to the British Isles that the bird had to be a Great Tit (*Parus major*) so I referred everyone to a book on British Birds and pondered. Since the bird was still coming to the feeder daily, I was able to visit on 23 May 2003 and get photos of a pair of Great Tits as they flew back and forth to the feeders for sunflower seeds. By now they had yellowed up considerably. They were not shy at all and fit in very well with the other chickadees and finches.



The pair remained through the summer and raised four young. Bo McConnell of Harvard reported seeing six Great Tits at one time in her backyard, with two adults doting on the four young. The Great Tits likely nested in a tree cavity, although no one found the nest. Various residents visited the feeders regularly through the summer and into fall, although by December, the Great Tits came less frequently and singly, so it was harder to keep track of them, especially of the juveniles.

In about February 2004, no one was seeing the Great Tits at the site where they likely bred, but another report was given of a pair of Great Tits at a feeder about one mile away. Also at this feeder there appeared a Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*).

By doing a lot of sleuthing I found that a gentleman in the area imports “exotic” birds especially from Europe. Either his cages are in

need of repair or he is emulating the Wild Bird Societies of the early years of this century when starlings and English sparrows were released in the U.S. along with Shakespearean favorites like larks, linnets and nightingales.

These members of the Tit family are certainly attractive, but so are other introduced species such as the European Starling that we now consider pests.

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Author's Note: A pair of Great Tits has been seen the first two weeks in April 2004 at a feeder in the same backyard where the young were noted the summer of 2003.