

## Bigamy in the Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)

Bigamy is rare in *Parus* titmice (HARRAP & QUINN 1996). In Europe, it has been recorded in Great Tits *Parus major*, but is more common in Blue Tits (*Parus caeruleus*) in optimal habitats (CRAMP & PERRINS 1993). It was never noticed in the Coal Tit, *Parus ater* (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM & BAUER 1993).

In 1998, during checks of nest-boxes and natural cavities on the Courish Spit on the Baltic Sea, two Coal Tit nests were found within 20 metres of each other. One was in a standard wooden nest-box provided by the Biological Station Rybachy, the other was in a natural cavity. This cavity had been used for nesting in 1994 by Coal Tits and again by Marsh Tits (*Parus palustris*) in 1995. In the nest-box the first egg was laid on 26th April. By 15th May the female was incubating 8 eggs on which date the natural cavity contained 7 eggs. Only one male was heard to sing at a time. In both nests hatching commenced on 20th May. After the nestlings reached the age of 7 days, trapping of the parent birds was started. During three days both of the females but only one male were captured.

All three adults hatched in 1997, the male was ringed as a pullus 7 km to the north from his breeding site. All birds were colour-ringed. The male was observed feeding at both nests. At the nest-box it appeared with food 2 to 5 times per hour (26 feeding arrivals during 8 hrs of observations). At the natural cavity he appeared once every 2 to 3 hours (3 arrivals during 10 hours). At the cavity nest, the female was feeding the young more frequently (55 times during 10 hours) than the female at the nest-box (36 times during 8 hours). The young fledged from the nest-box at the age of 18 days, and from the natural cavity at 19 days. During feeding of the young the male was seen singing near both nests. After fledging both broods were found to be living separately, the male being recorded near both broods. I did not manage to find a second clutch of either female.

On the Courish Spit the territory structure of the Coal Tit population is a mosaic of pair territories with permanent borders. Although Coal Tits are recorded in winter in mixed flocks of titmice they do so only as individuals or in pairs. A possible explanation of the bigamy case reported here could be that the singing male attracted a female which was returning to her natal area after the Coal Tit irruption of autumn 1997.

### Zusammenfassung

Bigamie bei der Tannenmeise (*Parus ater*).

Beschrieben wird das Auftreten von Bigamie bei der Tannenmeise (*Parus ater*) auf der Kurischen Nehrung (Russland) im Jahre 1998.

### References

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