

Bird watching – taken to an entirely new level

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Ever wonder what goes on inside a birdhouse?

My son, Austin, and I were wondering about that too. This year we decided to find out for ourselves by installing a webcam inside a birdhouse in our backyard. It started off as a science project for the two of us, but we were so excited & intrigued by what we saw when a pair of Tufted Titmice began building a nest in our birdhouse, that we decided to set up a website to record the day-to-day activities of this bird family. Each night, we selected the best videos and photos taken during the day and uploaded them to the website (www.dropshots.com/paulmurray). Very soon, the site became a huge hit on the internet. Thousands of people from all over the world (including birdwatchers, children, park rangers, and others curious about what goes on inside a birdhouse) were visiting the website and eagerly following the daily updates.

We, along with all the visitors on the internet, eagerly watched the progression of this Titmice family over a six-week period starting from the time when they came to the birdhouse “house-hunting”, to the eventual fledging of the chicks. It was a great learning experience for all of us.

The website includes a “blog” where visitors were able to leave comments, ask questions, and provide feedback. Visitors who were amazed at what they saw and what they learned left comments such as:

“We have learned an enormous amount which has caused our fascination with these fabulously interesting creatures to grow and grow”

“It truly is fascinating what you can learn”

“I have never seen anything like it. It is awe-inspiring”

“Amazing! I can’t even describe how seeing this miracle of life makes me feel!”

“You have truly captured the essence of life”

“This is better than Animal Planet!”

“No doubt the most clear nest cam I’ve ever watched”

“Superb video. Absolutely entrancing to watch”

As we watched these birds, we found answers to the following questions (you can find videos of all this at the website www.dropshots.com/paulmurray):

What do Titmice look for when they go “house-hunting”?

How do Titmice build their nests?

What are some of the predators that these birds have to deal with? How do they deal with them?

How do eggs hatch? (We had the awesome experience of witnessing the hatching of one of the chicks)

What happens to the eggshells? (Hint: they get recycled)

How is a nest kept so clean? (since the birdhouse does not have indoor plumbing)

What challenges do the younger siblings in the brood face? (The competition for food gets quite intense at times)

How do birds communicate? (The videos on the website include audio)

How do young chicks learn to fly? Do they take practice flights inside the birdhouse? (We witnessed the fledging of the chicks)

The experience of watching this Titmice family grow is an experience that Austin & I will fondly remember throughout our lives. We will continue to watch birds (using webcams or otherwise) throughout our lifetimes, and if we decide to share future experiences with the world we will be posting videos on the same website www.dropshots.com/paulmurray.