

Bushtit (Bt)

THIS VERY SMALL, undistinguished-looking bird resides year round in Eldorado. The Bt is 4.5 inches long, with a 6-inch wingspan. The male is light gray on his under parts and slightly darker gray above. The beak is very small and pointed, and the relatively long, thin tail seems to drag in flight. The male has a dark eye. The female is duller and has a yellow eye ringed with a thin black line. Except during breeding season, the Bt is usually seen in small flocks, moving animatedly through branches or flitting by ones, twos or threes between nearby trees. They prefer chaparral and open, low woods.

Pairs are seasonally monogamous. Both male and female build a pendulous, gourd-shaped nest, taking 13 to 31 days to complete. Nest material includes lichens, moss, leaves, spiderwebs, hair and feathers. They usually have two broods per year. Five to seven eggs hatch in 12 days, and the altricial young fledge in 14 or 15 days. Both parents brood and feed the young. Their diet is insects, spiders, seeds and fruit.

Bts seem to be increasing their range and numbers, as they do well in suburban neighborhoods. During cold winter nights, Bts huddle closely packed together in dense shrubs.

Here are some more interesting facts, from Cornell University, about Bts:

The Bushtit is the only member of its family in the Americas; seven other species are found in Eurasia. All have similar complex hanging nests. The Bushtit often has helpers at the nest, birds other than the parental pair that feed nestlings. All family members sleep together in the complex nest during breeding, but they leave it after the young fledge, and sleep on branches.

—Pam Henline

