

TITMICE IDENTIFICATION

GREG LASLEY

POST ON FACEBOOK

Please forgive me if this sounds *preachy" in any way as that is not my intent. I often find myself enjoying the various plumages of Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*), Black-crested Titmouse (*Baeolophus atricristatus*) and the several forms of hybrids between these two parent species. I am often asked about these birds and how you know when an individual is a hybrid, so thought I would post a few shots about these interesting birds to illustrate some points.

When I first started birding in Texas in the mid 1970s we had Tufted and Black-crested Titmice that were considered two separate species. Sometime around 1980 (if memory serves me correctly) they were "lumped" into one species and they were all called Tufted Titmouse. Then sometime in the early 90s (I think?) they were split again into Tufted and Black-crested as they remain today.

It is well known there is a narrow hybrid zone, roughly from the DFW area south to San Antonio and the central coast and roughly along and east of I-35, or the edge of the Edward's Plateau. In some areas the hybrid zone is as wide as 30 miles or so, in other areas, it is much narrower (ca. 10-15 miles wide). There are several published papers in the ornithological literature about these hybrids and where they occur.

In general, Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*) is a common resident bird in the eastern third of Texas (as well as much of the eastern U.S.). In general, Black-crested Titmouse (*Baeolophus atricristatus*) is a common resident in much of the western two-thirds of the state. Black-crested is the resident titmouse in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the Texas Hill Country, Big Bend National Park, the Davis Mountains, etc. I am attaching 5 images to this post.

There are subtle variations out there of hybrids slightly different in appearance from images 3, 4, and 5 here.

I have seen visually perfect Tufted Titmouse in Gonzales, very near hybrids and have seen visually perfect Black-crested Titmouse in Zorn (south of San Marcos on Hwy 123) in the same area with hybrids. Anyway, I find these birds intriguing and enjoy looking for them and documenting photographically the variations in the hybrid plumages. Hope some of you find this of interest.

TUFTED

Frontlet



Image 1

Typical Tufted
Bastrop
Plain gray crest
Black frontlet

BLACK- CRESTED



Image 2

Typical Black-crested
Western Travis County

Black crest

Pale buffy frontlet

Frontlet can be very pale,
almost whitish

HYBRID

Image 3

One end of hybrid spectrum

Luling

Pale gray crest

Chestnut-colored frontlet



Photo by Greg Lasley

HYBRID

Image 4

Southeast Metro Park

A little black in crest

Pale chestnut frontlet



Photo by Greg Lasley

HYBRID

Image 5

Gonzales

Much more black in crest

Very dark brown frontlet



VARIATION ALWAYS VARIATION !!!

- *Subtle variations of hybrids*
- *Visually perfect Tufted – very near hybrids*
 - *Gonzales*
- *Visually perfect Black-crested – same area as hybrids*
 - *South of San Marcos*

Greg Lasley



Photo by Matt Saunders



Photo by Gates DuPont



Photo by Ronan Nicholson

TUFTED



Photo by Ryan Sanderson



Photo by Juan Miguel Artigas Azas



Photo by Bryan Caulk

BLACK-CRESTED



Photo by Bob Zeller



Photo by Mark Daly

FROM HYBRID ZONE



Photo by Liam Wolff

Stillhouse
Hollow Lake

**FROM
HYBRID ZONE**



Photo by Daniel Kelch

**Bell County,
Texas**

**FROM
HYBRID ZONE**



Cleburne, Texas

A light-colored bird with a crest, possibly a hybrid species, is perched on a porous rock. The bird has a prominent crest, a small beak, and is facing left. The background is a blurred green, suggesting foliage. The text "FROM HYBRID ZONE" is overlaid in a white box in the top right corner.

FROM
HYBRID ZONE

Waco, Texas

Photo by Ezekial Dobson

FROM HYBRID ZONE

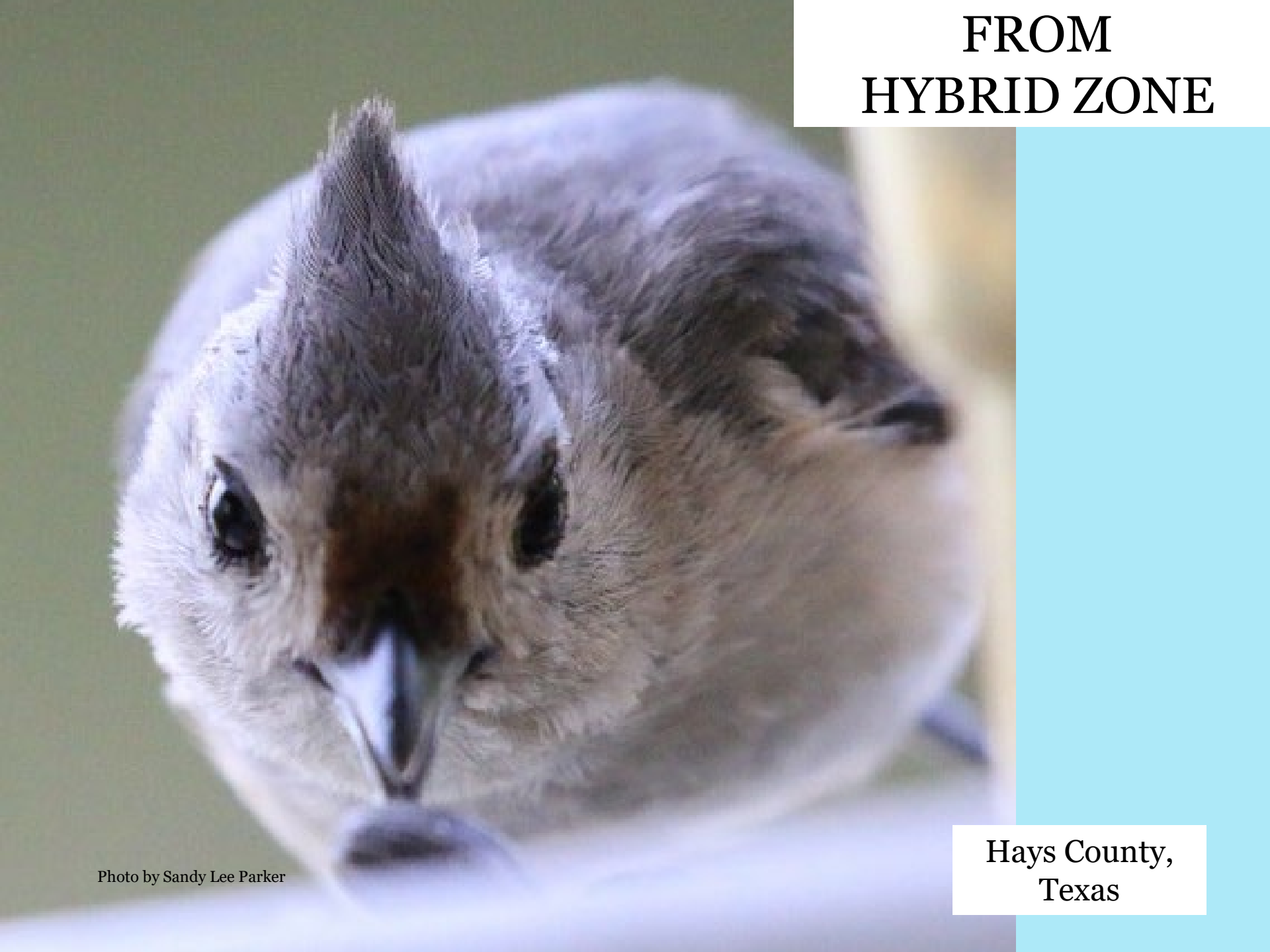
A close-up photograph of a bird's head, likely a junco, showing its crest and beak. The bird has a brown crest and a dark beak. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

Photo by Sandy Lee Parker

Hays County,
Texas

FROM HYBRID ZONE



Photo by Andreas Wooten

Bell County,
Texas

**FROM
HYBRID ZONE**



Photo by C. Jackson

**McClennen
County, Texas**

A hybrid cardinal, characterized by its greyish-brown upperparts and a prominent crest, is perched on a blue metal feeder. The bird is facing left, and its feet are firmly gripping the edge of the feeder. Behind the bird is a clear plastic seed tray filled with a mix of seeds, including sunflower seeds and smaller grains. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the feeder and some greenery.

FROM
HYBRID ZONE

Liberty Hill,
Texas

Photo by Pamela Caird

THE
END