

The Whitewinged Tit *Parus nuchalis* in Southern India and notes on the Great Tit *Parus major*

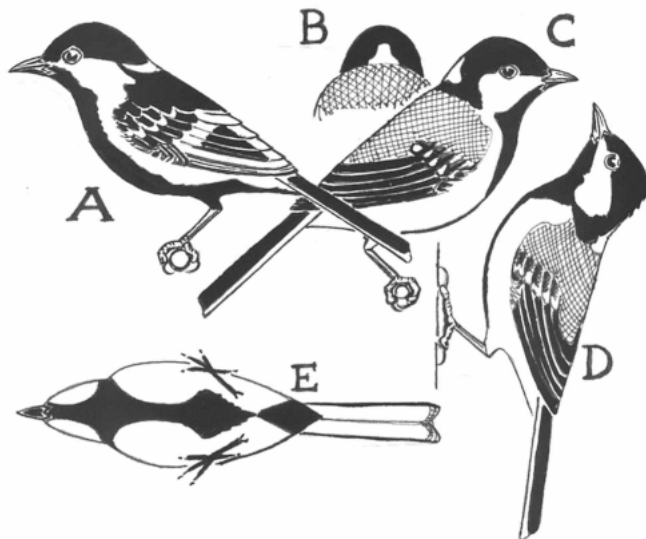
by L Shyamal

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"I Obtained this well marked species of tit from the Eastern Ghats West of Nellore. The shikarees who brought it to me said that it was rare. It has since been obtained by Dr. Stewart from a tope of trees near Bangalore ..."

T.C.Jerdon, 1863

On a recent trip to Vishakapatnam, I looked out for this species in and around the city, in the zoo premises, Simhachalam (which has the habitat described by Stuart Baker - tops of wooded hills) and also from the train (which moved at a pace that only a birdwatcher could appreciate) but it was all in vain. I have found only two recent reports of this tit in Southern India, both from the Kaveri valley 100 km south of Bangalore, where too I have failed to see it. Interestingly all the specimens of the Whitewinged Tit in the BNHS are from Kutch, Western India. It appears that this tit is much rarer than suggested by 'Jerdon's Shikarees'. The Whitewinged Tit sketch is of a Kutch specimen in the BNHS. It is to be seen if 1000 kilometres of separation has led to any visible differences. Some of the specimens show some buff on the flanks, which I was told was due to ageing. Salim Ali in his Birds of Gujarat states that breeding males carry much yellow on the flanks.



Great Tits *Parus major* show a lot of variation in the amount of black. The top sketch is from a newsletter coverphoto (Vol. 32, 9-10) of a breeding adult with a white vent. The underside view is of an adult, which was displaying, with a completely black vent (undertail coverts). The Great Tit facing right is an immature which had a rounded tail, incomplete 'chin-strap' and a curiously shaped white patch on the nape. Adult Great Tits also have a white nape which should not be confused with the nuchal patch of *Parus nuchalis* which I found to be smaller than shown in most illustrations.

**References:**

- Anon. (1994) Annotated Checklist of the birds of Bangalore. p 57
- Baker, E.C.S. (1922) Fauna of British India, Birds Vol. II. p 79
- Jerdon, T.C. (1863) The birds of India. Vol. II Part I. p 279
- Lott, E.J. (1987) Newsletter for birdwatchers, 29(9-10). p 16

POSTSCRIPT: There have been recent unpublished sightings of the species near Kengeri in Bangalore (Salim Hameed), and the Wynaad area of Kerala (Alan Morley). Published alongside this article was a note on the species being found in Dharwad by J.C.Uttangi. It is possible that there is no real gap between the western and southern populations.

## **MORE REFERENCES**

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- Tiwari, J.K. (1999): Status of the Pied Tit *Parus nuchalis* in South India. Newsletter for Birdwatchers. 39(2): 36.
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- Uttangi, J.C. (1995): A rare occurrence of the globally threatened White-naped Tit, *Parus nuchalis*, in areas of Dharwad, Karnataka, India. Newsletter for Birdwatchers. 35(6): 114-115.
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Response from M.K.Himmatsinhji commenting on the note in a private correspondence

M.K. Himmatsinhji

Jubilee Ground  
Bhuj, Kutch  
March 11, 1995

Dear Mr. Shyamal,

With reference to your letter of the 4th on the colours, status and so on of *Parus nuchalis*, it is a long time since I came across this bird in Kutch. Your sketch of it from the specimen of the bird in the BNHS is good, but it differs from the birds commonly seen here and from the photos as well as the picture in the coloured plate published in The Birds of Kutch. There is more black depicted on the sides and underside with the nuchal patch less prominently white in your sketch. The primaries and secondaries in the birds in Kutch have more white than shown in your sketch.

As far as the status of this species is concerned, it is no more seen in some of the areas it used to frequent previously. In fact is one of our endangered endemic species now. The threat to its existence comes mainly from the felling of trees in which it nests and lives. Its coexistence with *Picoides mahrattensis* (Yellowfronted Pied or Mahratta woodpecker) mostly in Kutch and parts of Rajasthan is well known to ornithologists and birdwatchers in general. So the habitat destruction would affect the latter species also. The Whitewinged Black Tit cannot obviously excavate its own nest-hole, but uses old nest sites of woodpeckers for its nidification. I need not comment on the present status of the bird as it is already mentioned by Hussain, Akhtar and Tiwari in their article mentioned by you already.

Apart from habitat destruction, wherever *P. nuchalis* lives near cultivated areas it faces the danger of imbibing poisonous pesticides through its insect food as these are widely used by farmers these days. I am not sending my above comments to the Newsletter, but you may do so if you think they are worthwhile. Please do not hesitate to send me queries on any subject other than the above whenever you feel like it.

Yours Sincerely  
sd. Himmatsinhji