

# The occurrence of the White-cheeked Barbet *Psilopogon viridis* in Toranmal Reserve Forest, Satpura Mountains, Maharashtra

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The White-cheeked Barbet *Psilopogon viridis* is endemic to India. It is distributed from south of the Surat Dangs of Gujarat along the Western Ghats range, and associated ranges, and in the southern Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu (Ali & Ripley 1987; Dasgupta *et al.* 2002; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Jathar & Rahmani 2007) extending through south-eastern Karnataka till Rishi valley in southern Andhra Pradesh (eBird 2016) (Fig. 1). It is mostly found below 1500 m, but occasionally at 2300 m (Ali and Ripley 1987). This species has not been recorded elsewhere apart from above mentioned geographical extent.

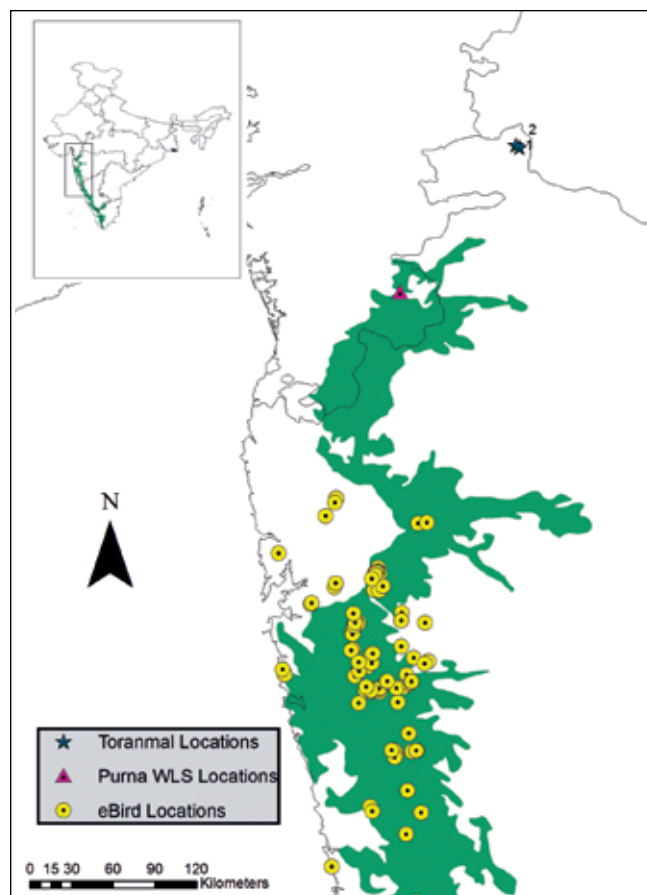


Fig. 1. Location of sighting of the White-cheeked Barbet *Psilopogon viridis* in Toranmal Reserve Forest, and its distribution as per eBird.

The presence of White-cheeked Barbet in the Satpura Hills has been long debated. Here we attempt to establish its status in the western part of this range. During 2001–2004, GJ observed White-cheeked Barbet, and Brown-headed Barbet *P. zeylanica*, several times in Toranmal Reserve Forest, which lies in the western part of the Satpura Hills. However, he did not keep a record of the species as both were relatively common in the plains and the hills.

Earlier records of White-cheeked Barbet are inconclusive. James Davidson (1882) reported that, "I think, I have once or twice noticed this bird in the Satpuras, but unluckily have never got any specimen". Similarly, in 1999, Farah Ishtiaq and Pamela Rasmussen put a "?" regarding the presence of the species in their unpublished checklist that was shared with me (Farah Ishtiaq, in litt. November 2002). A trip list prepared after a tour to Toranmal Reserve Forest in 2002–2003 by Ben King in 2002–2003 mentions this species (Ben King, *pers. comm.* April 2016) mentions occurrence of the species in the region. However, authentic evidence of its occurrence could not be established. The nearest such record is from Purna Wildlife Sanctuary (120 km south of Toranmal Reserve Forest), which lies in the Western Ghats (Trivedi & Soni 2006).

While visiting Toranmal Reserve Forest on 24–25 October 2015 VB was able to photograph the White-cheeked Barbet. On 24 October 2015, he visited Machindra Caves (21.86°N, 74.45°E; 1100 m asl) between 1700 and 1800 hrs, when he observed five birds, and heard a couple more in the valley nearby. On 25 October 2015, he observed, and photographed, about 16 individuals in the Kalapani area (21.85°N, 74.47°E; 950 m asl) in Toranmal Ghat [135–137]. The birds were either perched on trees or chasing each other. They were also seen chasing off other birds, such as Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, and Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*. These photographs confirm the presence of the White-cheeked Barbet in Toranmal Reserve Forest, of Satpura Mountains. It seems that the White-cheeked Barbet has occupied moist-deciduous, and semi-evergreen forests above 800 m in Toranmal Reserve Forest, whereas, the Brown-headed Barbet is confined to dry-deciduous forests in the plains. However, further study of their habitat preferences is required.

The morphological and vocal resemblances between these two species make it difficult to identify them in the field, without careful observation. Hence it appears to have been overlooked in the Satpura Mountains. This record not only confirms the



135. The White-cheeked Barbet *Psilopogon viridis* in Toranmal Reserve Forest.



137. The White-cheeked Barbet interacted with Green Bee-eaters *Merops orientalis*, among other birds.



Photos: Vinod Bhagwat

136. Several White-cheeked Barbets were seen in Toranmal Reserve Forest.

presence of the White-cheeked Barbet in the Satpuras, but also establishes that it is not confined to the Western Ghats, and parts of the Eastern Ghats. There is a need to explore the central, and eastern, parts of the Satpuras to establish its distribution.

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