

White-naped Tit *Machlolophus nuchalis* in Haryana

The White-naped Tit *Machlolophus nuchalis* is an Indian endemic with two disjunct populations in India. One is found in the states of Gujarat, and Rajasthan in north-western India, and the other, in the Eastern Ghats of southern India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a rare species, and is patchily distributed in a few locations. It is associated with thorn forest, and dry scrubland habitats. It is suspected to be declining rapidly, as a result of the loss and degradation of its habitat, and hence has been listed as 'Vulnerable' under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (BirdLife International 2017).

Two of us, RA, and SD, while birding on the morning of 09 October 2016, in Manethi village (28.16°N, 76.38°E), Rewari District, on the way to Narnaul, spotted a bird that we thought was a Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus*. But on closer observation, we noticed its black mantle, and wing coverts with white wing patches. Based on these features, and on the striking white nuchal patch, we identified the bird as a White-naped Tit. Around noon we recorded, and photographed, a single bird, which was followed by another bird after some time. When we visited the area after three days, we failed to locate the birds.

A second sighting of a single bird was on 14 February 2017, c. 50 km from Manethi, in Madhogadh village, Mahendergarh District (28.31°N, 76.03°E), by RA and Satish Kumar. It was on an acacia tree, in similar habitat, of thorny scrub forest, as the earlier bird.

On 16 July 2017, RA, CS, Satish Kumar, and Harvinder Singh saw seven birds near Manethi village. Just as we entered the scrub forest, we heard the call of the bird, and then a pair was seen in the acacia trees. The birds were singing from the top of the trees and, in between bouts of song, gleaning caterpillars from the trees. One of the birds caught a caterpillar but did not swallow it. It held it in its beak, and then flew away with it. So we presumed that it might be nesting and feeding chicks. We observed and photographed the birds [129] for about 15 min. After 30 min we came across five more White-naped Tits flitting on acacia, *Salvadora persica*, and *S. oleoides*. We observed them for five minutes before they flew away. We also watched White-bellied Minivet *P. erythropgius*, which are associated with the same habitat.



129. White-naped Tit. Photo by: Chetna Sharma

As Rewari and Mahendergarh districts are south-western districts of Haryana, bordering Rajasthan, and have the same habitat of dry thorny scrub forest seen in Rajasthan, it is not surprising that we found the White-naped Tit in Haryana. Haryana is poorly studied ornithologically, but records of such healthy numbers, indicate the importance of its habitat for the species (Table 1; 130).

Table 1. Observation records of White-naped Tit from Haryana

Date	Location	GPS coordinates	Number of Individuals observed
09 October 2016	Manethi, Rewari District	28.16°N, 76.38°E	2
14 February 2017	Madhogadh, Mahendergarh District	28.31°N, 76.03°E	1
16 July 2017	Manethi, Rewari District	28.16°N, 76.38°E	7



130. Habitat of White-naped Tit in Haryana. Pic: Rakesh Ahlawat

The threats this species faces, elsewhere in its range (Tiwari 2001, Trivedi 2009), including cutting of tropical thorn-scrub forest for fuelwood and illegal charcoal making, clearance for agricultural land and settlement construction, and over-grazing, are also prevalent in Haryana. The White-naped Tit nests in cavities in old trees, a rare commodity, as most of them have been felled. The spread of non-native shrubs like *Prosopis glandulosa* and *P. chilensis* is also detrimental to the dry thorn-scrub. Proposed cement factories, stone quarrying, and a proposed medical establishment in Manethi village, threaten the remaining suitable habitat, all of which may prove detrimental for this bird.

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– Rakesh Ahlawat, Chetna Sharma & Sonu Dalal

Rakesh Ahlawat, Field Assistant, Nature Conversation Foundation, VPO Dighal Pana 124107, Jhajjar, Haryana, India.

E-mail: rakeshahlawat89@gmail.com [RA]

Chetna Sharma, Voice for Nature, Modern Diagnostics, Kaithal, Haryana, India.

E-mail: drchetna84@gmail.com [CS]

Sonu Dalal, VPO Mandothi Tehsil, Bahadurgarh, Jhajjar, Haryana, India.

E-mail: sonudalal710@gmail.com [SD]