

The White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus* at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh, and its recent records from India

Two races of the White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus* have been recognised, *R. c. coronatus* and *R. c. stoliczkae*. Individuals seen in India belong to the former, which breeds in southern and south-eastern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, northern and southern Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, north-western China, western Tajikistan, and north-western Afghanistan. It winters in eastern Iran, northern and western Afghanistan, Pakistan, and north-western India (Madge 2020). In India the species is 'very local', and fairly common in Punjab (Grimmett et al. 1998). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) rejected the summer record of the species from Ladakh, by Meinertzhagen (1927). Grimmett et al. (2011) depicted its distribution in Harike, Punjab, and a record over the Delhi region. In the Indian Subcontinent it is mainly seen in reed beds, acacia trees in riverine forest, and irrigated forest plantation (Grimmett et al. 1998). In this note we describe our sighting of the White-crowned Penduline Tit at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh, and compile all its records from India, except from Harike.

On 23 December 2019, we went to Shah Nehar Barrage at the outflow area of Pong Dam, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh (31.96°N, 75.90°E; c.325 m asl), with Vijay Ramachandran and Atanu Mondal. While birding along one pond near the Shah Nehar Barrage Lake, CA first spotted a flock of nine birds feeding in a patch of *Saccharum* sp. [53]. We all had good views of the birds and identified them as White-crowned Penduline Tits. They kept moving, frequently crossing the road to access the patches of reeds on the side of the lake. They were also observed picking worms from the *Lantana* sp. [54] and feeding on the seeds in the fluffy cotton heads of *Typha* sp., [55]. They were generally silent, but sometimes uttered a high-pitched 'tsee'. The extent of black on the head was variable between individuals because of sexual dimorphism, and also due to uneven wear [53, 56 & 57]. Three individuals had very prominent and broad black face masks, which extended towards their napes; and we identified them as males. The remaining birds had less extensive, and duller, black bands on the face. They remained in sight for c.30 min and then they moved to the other side of the lake, where Agrawal (2018) had recorded them earlier.



53. White-crowned Penduline Tit in a patch of *Saccharum* grass.



54. A White-crowned Penduline Tit feeding on a worm.



55. White-crowned Penduline Tit on the heads of *Typha* sp.



56. White-crowned Penduline Tit, with extensive black on head, feeding in *Lantana* sp. scrub.

Table 1. Chronological records of White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus* from India, excluding Harike.

S. No.	Locality	State	Date	Comments	Reference
1.	Okhla Bird Sanctuary, Gautam Buddha Nagar District	Uttar Pradesh	21 December 1981	Four birds seen	Robson 1981; Vyas 2019
2.	Okhla Bird Sanctuary, Gautam Buddha Nagar District	Uttar Pradesh	February 2006	Multiple sightings of a flock. Photographed	Harvey et al. 2006; Hyde 2006; Vyas 2019
3.	Okhla Bird Sanctuary, Gautam Buddha Nagar District	Uttar Pradesh	November 2011	Multiple sightings of a flock. Photographed	Nitu S. 2011; Vyas 2019
4.	Asan Conservation Reserve, District Dehradun	Uttarakhand	04 March 2018	Three individuals in reeds were seen and photographed	Lodha 2018
5.	Near Shah Nehar Barrage, Pong Lake, Kangra District	Himachal Pradesh	11 March 2018	Five individuals were seen feeding in trees on either side of a path. Photographed	Agrawal 2018
6.	Asan Conservation Reserve, District Dehradun	Uttarakhand	20 January 2019	10–12 birds seen. Photographed	Sanjay Sondhi, <i>in litt.</i> , e-mail dated 02 April 2020
7.	Sultanpur National Park, Gurugram District	Haryana	21 February 2019	Two individuals were seen feeding in dense <i>Acacia</i> trees. Photographed	Soerensen 2019
8.	Karian, Fazilka District	Punjab	17 March 2019	Six individuals seen. Photographed	Singh 2019
9.	66 MGD Water Treatment Plant Chandu Budhera, Gurugram District	Haryana	24 November 2019	Single bird was seen near a marshy area. Photographed	Vidwansa 2019
10.	Asan Conservation Reserve, District Dehradun	Uttarakhand	30 November 2019	Photographed during the Asan Bird Festival.	Sanjay Sondhi, <i>in litt.</i> , e-mail dated 02 April 2020
11.	Shah Nehar Barrage, Pong Lake, Kangra District	Himachal Pradesh	23 December 2019	Nine individuals seen. Photographed	Present record
12.	Chak Sarkar Forest, Ferozpur District	Punjab	24 January 2020	16 individuals seen. Photographed	Sachdeva 2020
13.	Haiderpur Wetland, Muzaffarnagar District	Uttar Pradesh	February 2020	Multiple sightings of upto four individuals. Photographed	Dasgupta 2020; Panwar 2020



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57. White-crowned Penduline Tit, with almost no black on the head, on *Lantana* sp.

There have been several records of White-crowned Penduline Tit from Harike (eBird 2020) and it has been described as locally common at this place (Grimmett et al. 1998). CA has seen the species, and photographed it, at Harike on 13 February 2010 and 27 November 2018. All records from other places in India are given in Table 1.

Most of the records of White-crowned Penduline Tit from India, but outside Harike, are from the past three years. This might be due to the great increase in the number of birders across the country. The maximum number of these records occurred at Okhla Bird Sanctuary, where 04–12 birds were seen (Vyas 2019), and at Asan Conservation Reserve, where it was recorded during the last three consecutive winters. White-crowned Penduline Tit has not been mentioned in the extant literature of Himachal Pradesh

(den Besten 2004; Grimmett et al. 2011; Dhadwal 2011, 2020), and is an addition to the avifauna of the state. As indicated by the records in Table 1, the White-crowned Penduline Tit should be considered as a scarce, but regular, winter migrant to north and north-western India, excluding Harike, where it is more frequent. We thank Sanjay Sondhi for sharing his records.

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Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri* feeding on the bark of *Aglaia spectabilis*

On 12 February 2020, at 1525 h, while strolling at our village in Ultapani, Kokrajhar District, Assam (26.77°N, 90.30°E), we came upon a pair of Red-breasted Parakeets *Psittacula alexandri* perched on a *Aglaia spectabilis* tree. From a distance we started taking photos, and upon looking closer at them we saw they were feeding on the bark of the tree. They perched on the tree, pecked the bark bit-by-bit and swallowed it, leaving behind an excavated ring-shaped mark on the tree. This feeding lasted for about 15–20 mins [58–61].

The diet of Red-breasted Parakeet includes the nectar, and flowers of several species: *Salmaia*, *Bombax*, *Butea*, *Parkia speciosa* and *Erythrina variegata*, and seeds of *Albizia*, chestnuts (*Castanea*), fruits of *Ficus*, bananas, leaf buds of teak, rice, and grains (Collar et al. 2020). This is the first report of feeding behaviour of Red-breasted Parakeet on tree bark.

The genus *Aglaia* Lour. is the largest genus of the family Meliaceae, mainly distributed in the tropical rainforests of Southeast Asia (Ebada et al. 2011). It is an important source of compounds bearing cyclopentatetrahydrobenzofurans skeleton, called rocalgate or rocalgamide derivatives, or flavaglines, which have been found to have potent antiparasitic bioactivity (Tropical Plants Database 2020). Rocalgates or rocalgamides are a class of natural products derived from *Aglaia* spp., found to target eIF4A (eukaryotic initiation factor), where they cause eIF4 to clamp onto RNA occurring in mRNA 5' leader region, acting as a steric barrier to the initiation process, and depletes eIF4F complex of its eIF4A helicase subunit resulting in reduced initiation complex formation; and rocalgates CR-1-31B is proved to block replication of malarial parasite thus showing antiplasmodial effect against the parasites (Langlais et al. 2018).



58. Pair of Red-breasted Parakeet feeding on the tree *Aglaia spectabilis*.



59. Red-breasted Parakeet choosing the feeding site.



60. Red-breasted Parakeet pecking the bark of *Aglaia spectabilis*.