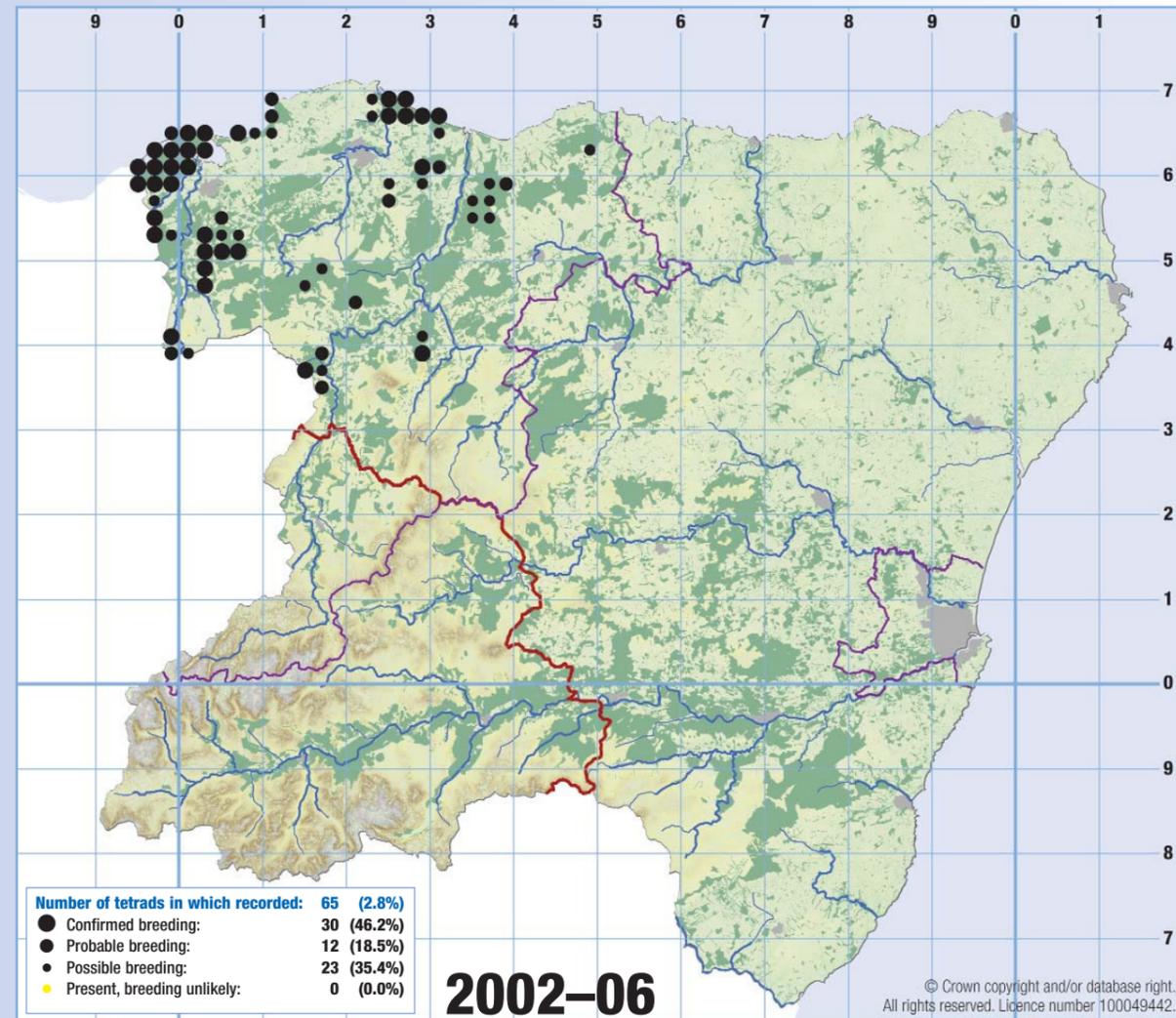


Scarce resident. Estimated population in North-East Scotland: **300–450 pairs** (25% of Scottish and UK population)  
Amber list



### Habitat and breeding biology

Crested Tits in Scotland are primarily birds of Scots Pine woodland, inhabiting ancient native pinewoods and, as is the case in North-East Scotland, plantations. In mixed woodland they can, infrequently, be found among other conifers, such as Lodgepole Pine, and even deciduous broad-leaved species such as birch and Rowan (Summers *et al.* 1999). Heather is also an important feature of the habitat as this provides winter foraging opportunities. In late summer, post-breeding dispersal of young birds accounts for their occasional presence in atypical habitats such as willow scrub and agricultural land. The birds excavate their own nest holes into the sapwood of pine stumps and dead pines, requiring a minimum diameter of at least 20 cm to accommodate the nest chamber. They will use nest boxes, more readily when deep boxes filled with wood shavings are available. First eggs may be laid as early as the first week in April but more commonly in mid April, and occasionally laying may be delayed until early May. Mean clutch size of 51 clutches in Lossie Forest during 1989–2003 was 5.7 eggs (pers. obs.).

### Scottish distribution and status

The breeding range, of the Scottish endemic subspecies *L. c. scoticus*, extends from the ancient pinewoods of upper

Strathspey to the plantations of lower Strathspey and the coastal plains around the inner Moray Firth from Moray to south-east Sutherland. They can also be found in the forests of the west Highland glens, including Strath Bran, Strathconon, Strathfarrar, Glen Affric, Glen Moriston and Glen Garry. The number of winter social groups has been estimated at 2,300–3,300, comprising 5,600–7,900 individuals (Summers *et al.* 1999). By early spring this number will be substantially reduced and the breeding population may fluctuate within the range 1,000–2,000 pairs (Cook in BS3).

### Distribution and status in North-East Scotland

The entire North-East Scottish population of Crested Tits is found in Moray. Along the coast, Culbin, Roseisle and Lossie Forests all hold substantial numbers and they are widely, but more thinly, distributed in the Darnaway, Altyre and Newtyle Forests south of Forres. Even small pinewoods as far up country as Dava hold a few birds. A similar low density is typical in the Whiteash Hill and Ordiequish woods near Fochabers, and up the Spey valley. Other extensive tracts of forestry such as Dallas moor, Monaghty and Aultmore appear uninhabited or, at best, hold birds at such low density that they were not detected during Atlas fieldwork. Some of these woods contain rather little Scots



Crested Tit, xxx. © David Whitaker

Pine while other blocks may be insufficiently mature. Although Crested Tits do not breed there, they have reached Aberdeenshire in nine years during the period 1968–2004 (Cook in BS3). Although most of these occurrences have been during autumn or winter, single birds were seen in apparently suitable breeding habitat in May 1977 (NESBR 1977) and one bird was at Linn o'Dee during April and May 1999 (NESBR 1999). The reason for the absence of breeding Crested Tits from the apparently suitable ancient Scots Pinewoods of upper Deeside is unclear.



Crested Tit, Culbin, July 1980. © Martin Cook

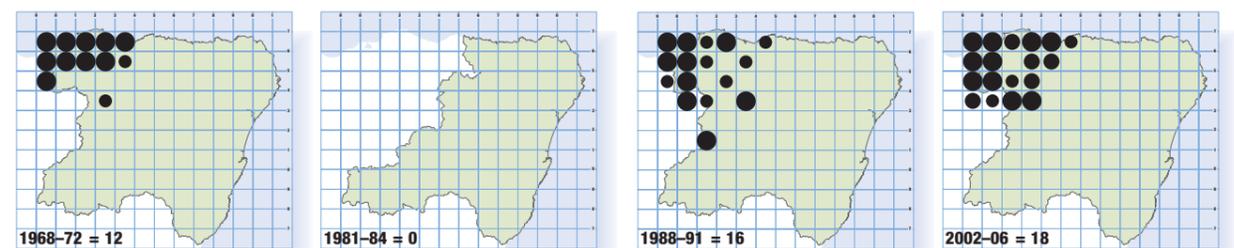
### Changes in distribution

The lowland and coastal plantations of Moray were gradually colonised, presumably from upper Speyside, during 1860–1940. First records came from the Fochabers area in the 1860s and by the end of the century they were well established there. By 1910 they had spread to the Forres area and the lower Findhorn valley (Cook 1982, 1992). As more plantations matured along the coast the population was consolidated. There is little evidence of further range changes in more recent times - the increase in occupied 10-km squares since the early 1970s is probably a consequence of further spread into mature plantations within the existing range. Natural colonisation of Deeside seems unlikely in the near future as the Cairngorms present a barrier to any substantial eastward movement from Strathspey and the predominantly Sitka Spruce plantations of lower Banffshire and Donside would appear to provide little opportunity for immigration from the north.

### Population and trends

Crested Tits were recorded during 2002–06 in 65 tetrads. Even where it was not proved, the sedentary nature of Crested Tits during the breeding season suggests that breeding probably occurred in most of these tetrads. Taking into account the area of each tetrad that contains suitable habitat reveals about 120 km<sup>2</sup> of such habitat, of which 39 km<sup>2</sup> is in the coastal forests. Assuming that the approximate density of 4–5 pairs/km<sup>2</sup> in Lossie Forest (pers. obs.) is typical of the coastal forests, and that the density elsewhere is lower at, perhaps, 2–3 pairs/km<sup>2</sup> then a population range between 300–450 pairs would be likely in a typical year. Although this fits reasonably alongside the Scottish estimate of 1,000–2,000 pairs, a more reliable estimate of numbers in the North-East will depend on density measurements from a wider range of woodlands.

Author: Martin Cook



North-East Scotland 1968–72 to 2002–06: Change in occupied 10-km squares = +50%