



## SPECIES

Photos: Norman Crowson, Luc Viatour

# Marsh tit (*Poecile palustris*)

Information: Richard Thornbury

### All about the marsh tit

- A bird of mature deciduous woods with a tall (<15m), mature canopy and well-developed understorey. They primarily use the lower parts of trees and the shrub layer, especially if it is so well-developed that you can't see through the woodland. They avoid structurally similar secondary habitats, such as scrub and hedgerows.
- They need a large territory of >5ha (preferably >10ha) of contiguous mature woodland with a well-developed shrub layer and are completely sedentary once established in a territory.
- Young birds disperse short distances to establish new territories, typically <1.5km. Dispersing birds are very reluctant to cross open ground with anything over 100m unlikely to be attempted.
- They nest low down in cavities in medium to large hardwood trees which they may enlarge but do not excavate. They like old knotholes and seem to prefer ash trees, avoiding oak and field maple.
- They less frequently use nest boxes than blue and great tits.

### Why do marsh tits need our help?

The need for a large contiguous territory, a high degree of sedentism, short dispersal distances for young birds establishing new territories and an inability to cross open country make this species extremely vulnerable to the impacts of habitat fragmentation.

They are vulnerable to any factors damaging the shrub layer, such as overgrazing by deer, shading out by canopy closure and clearance of shrub cover.

## How can we help?

- The most important way we can help is by maintaining and improving habitat connectivity. Land managers should identify blocks of suitable habitat that are isolated or at risk of isolation and work to provide and protect connectivity through woods, trees and hedges.
- Management that produces a dense shrub layer under taller trees will help marsh tits.
- Canopies should neither be allowed to close over (as this will inhibit shrub layer development) or be opened up too much; around 60–80% cover is ideal.
- Where there is a poorly developed shrub layer, steps should be taken to improve it. This could include enrichment planting under existing trees, pollarding suitable trees, winching over living trees and allowing them to regrow along their length, and thinning over-shaded canopies.
- The impacts of deer browsing on shrub development also needs to be considered and managed by culling and/or exclusion.

**DID YOU KNOW? Marsh tits look almost identical to the even more threatened willow tits. They are best told apart by their calls and local knowledge.**

**Marsh tits are also food hoarders and will carry off food from bird feeders to hide for later!**

## How do I monitor and record?

- It is important to identify habitats, particularly mapping suitable habitat and establishing marsh tits' presence or absence. Next, identify any connectivity issues, vulnerabilities and opportunities for enhancement. This will work best with a combined plan with neighbouring land managers.
- Marsh tits will respond to a play-back of their calls which can help find out where they are living. Please remember not to disturb marsh tits during the breeding season.
- Enter records into iRecord.

## Learn more

- Broughton, R and Hinsley, S. "The ecology and conservation of the Marsh Tit in Britain" ResearchGate [researchgate.net/publication/275583913](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275583913) [The ecology and conservation of the Marsh Tit in Britain](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275583913) |
- Broughton, R et al. "An efficient survey method for estimating populations of Marsh Tits *Poecile palustris*, a low-density woodland passerine." ResearchGate [researchgate.net/publication/327779038](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327779038) [An efficient survey method for estimating populations of Marsh Tits \*Poecile palustris\* a low-density woodland passerine](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327779038) |
- Bird Guides (2010) Marsh and Willow Tits [birdguides.com/articles/identification/marsh-and-willow-tits/](https://www.birdguides.com/articles/identification/marsh-and-willow-tits/)
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