

## First registration of European crested tit *Lophophanes cristatus* (Linnaeus, 1758) in Ponor Mountain, West Bulgaria

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**Abstract.** The European crested tit *Lophophanes cristatus* (Linnaeus, 1758) is reported for first time in the Ponor Mountain, West Bulgaria, during the breeding season. The habitat, where one pair was observed, is a large, old pine plantation. Most probably, the forestation with coniferous species in the past is the reason for the occurrence of the Crested tit at a low altitude – 718 m.

**Key words:** *Lophophanes cristatus*, registration, Ponor Mountain.

On July 3, 2014, a pair of European crested tits *Lophophanes cristatus* (Linnaeus, 1758) was observed, east of neighborhood Dobarchin of Iskrets village (coordinates N42.995170°, E23.284970°, 718 m a.s.l.). This is the first record of the species in the Ponor Mountain. The species has not been mentioned so far for this well-studied ornithological region in the regional studies of Stoyanov (2001), Nikolov & Vassilev (2003), Nikolov (2007), Dyulgerova & Nikolov (2014). The European crested tit is not mentioned for this region also in the complete surveys of the species in Bulgaria (Nankinov 2009, Nankinov 2010, Nikolov 2007), and for the Balkan Peninsula (Michev *et al.* 2012).

The habitat, where the pair was observed, was a large, old coniferous plantation (planted 50 years ago and more, personal estimation) of Austrian (*Pinus nigra*) and Scots (*P. sylvestris*) pine. In different areas of the Ponor Mountain and the neighboring Mala Mountain large-scale afforestation with coniferous species has been carried out since the beginning, and especially around the middle of the last century. Their area in the Ponor Mountain is about 1500 ha (Dimitrov & Petrova 2014). Most probably, the creation of those plantations is the reason for the occurrence here of the European crested tit (typical for the mountainous coniferous forests of Bulgaria). So far, the closest established nesting sites of the Crested tit are located in the high mountain coniferous forests in the Western Balkan Mountain - in different localities from the town of Berkovitsa to the Chuprene Reserve (Nikolov 2007, personal data).

Most probably the observed birds were breeding, and not wandering birds. According to Nankinov (2009) and Nankinov (2010), in Bulgaria the nesting period of this species is quite prolonged, with some of the pairs having a second brood. According to these authors, the first eggs in Bulgaria are hatched between March and mid April, and the last juveniles leave the nest between the end of July and mid-August. A matter of interest is also the low altitude - 718 m a.s.l., at which the species was observed during a period that coincides with its breeding season. This altitude falls within the lower altitudinal range, described for

the species in Southwest Bulgaria (Stoyanov & Shurulinkov 2016). According to this publication, the species nests from 600 to 1700 m a.s.l., most often in the range of 800 - 1200 m a.s.l. According to Nikolov (2007), the Crested tit in Bulgaria nests in the range of 1200 - 2000 m a.s.l., and according to Nankinov (2010), this range is 1000 - 2100 m a.s.l. At the time when the crested tit was registered, some other species of birds, typical for the mountainous coniferous forests, were observed in the same area of the Ponor Mountain: Coal tit *Periparus ater* (Linnaeus, 1758), Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (Linnaeus, 1758), Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* (Linnaeus, 1758).

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