

Common Name/Scientific name: Crested Shrike-tit / *Falcunculus frontatus*

With its outlandish Mohawk hairstyle, black-and-white striped face, and bright-yellow front, the Crested Shrike-tit appears conspicuous. Yet, when feeding in the canopy of trees, they are often difficult to see — it is only the sound of them tearing off pieces of bark with their stout bills to feed on invertebrates underneath that alerts us to their presence. Confined to mainland Australia, there are three distinct subspecies, all of which look rather similar, but there are subtle differences in their size and appearance.



Description: The Crested Shrike-tit is a medium-small bird with a striking black and white striped head and neck, a small crest that is often held flattened over crown, a black throat, and a short heavy bill with hooked tips. It has wide, rounded wings and a square-tipped tail that can appear slightly forked. The species is separated into three geographically isolated subspecies. Males of the eastern Crested Shrike-tit, *Falcunculus frontatus*, have an olive green back and rump, striking yellow underparts, with grey wings and tail. Females of all races have a smaller head crest and an olive-green throat. Young birds have a pale throat and a brown back.

Feeding & Behaviour in the gardens: The Crested Shrike-tit feeds mainly on insects, but will sometimes eat fruits and seeds. It forages in trees, rarely on or near the ground, tearing at or probing bark for insects with its short strong bill. It usually forages alone, in pairs or in groups of up to five birds, which are usually related. It will also be seen in mixed feeding flocks with other insect-eating birds, especially male Golden Whistlers.

Breeding and Nesting: The male Shrike-tit selects a nest-site in a high fork of a eucalypt tree, attracting the female to him with quivering and waving wings. The female builds the deep cone-shaped nest from dry grass and bark strips, covering the outside with spider web, moss and lichen. The male helps collect materials, and both sexes incubate the eggs and feed the young. Two broods may be raised in a season, and the young birds may remain with their parents until the beginning of the next breeding season. Nests may be parasitised by Pallid, Brush and Fan-tailed Cuckoos.

Similar Species in the gardens: The Crested Shrike-tit is hard to mistake for any other species. The male Golden Whistler, *Pachycephala pectoralis*, which is found in similar habitats, has yellow underparts and black and white on the head and neck. However, it has an all-black head with a white throat patch and does not have a crest.