



**Habitat:**

Semi-evergreen, evergreen and moist deciduous forests of Western Ghats and their foothills, adjacent groves and gardens, also near human habitation in this terrain. From plains to 1800 m ASL.



White-cheeked Barbet prefers wooded areas including foot hills and adjacent plain country

**Key Features:**

- White eye brow and cheek patch.
- Bristles cover the base of yellow beak.
- Back and tail green. Streaked brown head and brown streaks on whitish belly.
- Dark naked orbital patch.
- Iris – grey - brown.
- Legs –dark, horny.

**Chick:**

- Born naked, nidicolus. Attain adult like plumage prior to fledging.

**Habit:**

Diurnal. Arboreal. Occur in pairs. Flocks of up to two dozen or more barbets are seen on fruiting **Ficus** trees or flowering silk cotton etc. trees with insect eating birds like bulbuls, woodpeckers, and flycatchers. Climb up or descend on vertical tree trunks in search of insects.

**Distribution:**

In the entire Western Ghats in India.  
**Status:** **Endemic** to India in Western Ghats. Resident. Common.

**Food:**

Territorial when feeding and keep other birds away. Berries, fruits, caterpillars, mantis, grasshoppers, spiders, termites, etc . Also take nectar of **Cochlospermum, Bombax, Grevillea, Erythrina,** etc. flowers.



Reaching out for figs



Pithecelobium fruit in beak



Mulberry



Eating Syzigium jambos



Approaching a guava



Berry in the beak



Insect



Praying Mantis is a favourite food item rich in proteins



The palate



Grey iris



Shades of green on the back and tail



Streaked throat and chest. white cheek

**Flight:**



**Cultural aspects:**

In ancient Indian culture, the related Coppersmith Barbet is known as the goldsmith bird or **Hemak** due to the call that resembles the tinkering sounds from their instruments.



The colourful barbets feature on postal stamps



**Etymology:**

**Megalaima** ( Gr.) **megas**, great; **laimos**, the throat; , **viridis** (L.), green. (Pande, Satish (2009).

**Some related species:**

- 1) **Brown-headed Barbet** (*Megalaima zeylanica*): In forested areas.
- 2) **Coppersmith Barbet** (*Megalaima haemacephala*). Open woodlands, cropland, and urban gardens.
- 3) **Great Barbet** (*Megalaima virens*). In Himalayan and North East Indian forests.



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Nest Making:

A self excavated hole in a tree from 6 to 30 feet up (coconut, fish-tail palm, drumstick, flame of the forest, etc. ), usually in a snag or a dead or decaying branch, but also in live trees. Several holes may be seen in one trunk, which may be communicating or otherwise. The nests are also used as night roosts. Wooden shavings are carried in the beak and thrown outside and the nest is kept clean during the breeding season. Both parents incubate and attend the nestlings.



Threats:

Tree felling, reducing number of fruit trees, mining, habitat loss and modification, insecticides and pesticides.

FACT FILE: Whitecheeked Barbet *Megalaima viridis* (Boddaert, 1783).

Type locality: Mahe (India).  
*Kartuk* (Marathi); *Chota Basant* (Hindi).

- **Size:** 23 cm.
- **Weight:** 70-90 g.
- **Wing:** 97-113 mm.
- **Tail:** 65-70 mm.
- **Tarsus:** 27 mm.
- **Bill:** 24-29 mm.
- **Breeding season:** December to June.
- **Clutch:** 1 – 4 eggs. One to two clutches per year.
- **Eggs:** Oval; pure white.
- **Egg Size:** 26.2 mm x 20.3 mm (Baker).
- **Incubation:** 15 - 18 d.
- **Fledging:** 36 to 38 days.
- **Nuptial displays:** Incessant vocal duets by partners.
- **Call:** Starts with *prrr*, then *kutroo, kutroo, poocock, poocock*, from perch. Also *tuk*. Call from dawn to dusk during breeding time. Other barbets join in calling and the forest resounds with the monotonous calls.
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Phenology:



Economic importance and conservation:

The barbets devour ripe coffee berries in coffee plantations to some extent, but do not cause significant damage. They play an important role as seed dispersal agents and pollinate flowers. Protected under Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Rural Outreach Programs, such as those undertaken by Ela Foundation for public education stressing conservation of their habitat is the key to their survival. Conservation of existing trees and planting indegeneous fruit trees is essential.

Amazing Facts:

The barbets along with hornbills are responsible for widespread dispersal of seeds of *Ficus* and other fruiting tree species thereby enriching forest diversity. This barbet is found only in India in the Western Ghats.



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White-cheeked Barbet

- **Order:** Piciformes
- **Family:** Megalaimidae
- **Status:** Endemic. Resident

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