

Bushtit

Psaltriparus minimus

Bushtits are sprightly, social songbirds that twitter as they fly weakly between shrubs and thickets in western North America. Almost always found in lively flocks, they move constantly, often hanging upside down to pick at insects or spiders on the undersides of leaves. Flocks of Bushtits mix with similar small songbirds like warblers, chickadees, and kinglets while foraging. Bushtits weave a very unusual hanging nest, shaped like a soft pouch or sock, from moss, spider webs, and grasses.

Keys to Identification

Size & Shape

Bushtits are tiny, kinglet-sized birds. They are plump and large-headed, with long tails and short, stubby bills.

Color Pattern

Bushtits are fairly plain brown-and-gray birds. Slightly darker above than below, they have brown-gray heads, gray wings, and tan-gray underparts. Males in parts of the range have contrasting blackish face masks.

Behavior

Bushtits move quickly through vegetation, almost always in flocks, and continuously make soft chips and twitters. They forage much as chickadees do, frequently hanging upside down to grab small insects and spiders from leaves. Bushtits build a hanging nest out of soft materials such as grasses and spider webs.

Habitat

Bushtits live in oak forest, evergreen woodlands, dry scrublands, streamsides, and suburbs. You can find them at elevations from sea level to over 10,000 feet.

Cool Facts

- A breeding Bushtit pair often has helpers at the nest that aid in raising the nestlings. This already rare behavior is made more unusual by the fact that the helpers are typically adult males.
- For most breeding birds, only one adult at a time sleeps on the nest, but all Bushtit family members sleep together in their large, hanging nest during the breeding season. Once the young fledge, they all leave the nest and thereafter sleep on branches.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 2.8 - 3.1 inches
- Weight - 0.1 - 0.2 ounces

