

Sitta whiteheadi -- Sharpe, 1884

ANIMALIA -- CHORDATA -- AVES -- PASSERIFORMES -- SITTIDAE

Common names: Corsican Nuthatch;

European Red List Assessment

European Red List Status

VU -- Vulnerable, (IUCN version 3.1)

Assessment Information

Year published:	2015
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Reviewer(s):	Symes, A.
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Assessment Rationale

European regional assessment: Vulnerable (VU)

EU27 regional assessment: Vulnerable (VU)

This species is endemic to Europe and the EU27, where it is listed as Vulnerable because its small population has declined in the last decade due to logging and fires, reducing the amount of large, mature Corsican pine *Pinus nigra laricio* available. Although some forests are regenerating, the slow maturation time of the pine means that potential new habitat does not compensate for the loss of mature pines elsewhere, therefore it is assumed that the population will continue to decline.

Occurrence

Countries/Territories of Occurrence

Native:

France

Population

The European population is estimated at 1,500-2,200 pairs, which equates to 3,000-4,400 mature individuals. The entire population is found in the EU27. For details of national estimates, see [Supplementary PDF](#).

Trend

In Europe and the EU27 the population size is estimated to be decreasing by at least 10% in 12 years (three generations). For details of national estimates, see [Supplementary PDF](#).

Habitats and Ecology

Optimal habitat for this species is mature stands of Corsican pine with abundant dead and rotting trunks for nest sites, at elevations of 1,000-1,500 m (Harrap and de Juana 2013). Densities vary between 0.2–3.8 pairs/10 ha, and correlate with tree height, vegetation density and dead tree distribution (Thibault and Bonaccorsi 1999). Suboptimal habitats include forests where Corsican pine is associated with cluster pine (*Pinus pinaster*), balsam fir (*Abies alba*) or beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), and younger, exploited stands of Corsican pine at elevations of 600–1,700 m. Dispersing birds may be found in holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) and sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) forests, gardens and orchards (Thibault and Bonaccorsi 1999, Harrap and de Juana 2013). Its breeding season stretches from April to May, laying a clutch of five to six eggs, with mated partners remaining on their territory all year. It feeds largely on insects and spiders during May-August, switching to seeds, especially those of the Corsican pine, during the rest of the year. It forages singly or in pairs, though may join mixed-species flocks outside the breeding season. Seeds are cached from late autumn to early spring during periods of sunny weather (when the cones are open) and retrieved during wet or cold weather (Harrap and de Juana 2013). It is generally sedentary except for some dispersal of immature and unmated birds to lower altitudes in winter (Thibault and Bonaccorsi 1999).

<u>Habitats & Altitude</u>		
Habitat (level 1 - level 2)	Importance	Occurrence
Artificial/Terrestrial - Arable Land	suitable	non-breeding

Habitats & Altitude			
Habitat (level 1 - level 2)		Importance	Occurrence
Artificial/Terrestrial - Rural Gardens		suitable	non-breeding
Forest - Temperate		major	resident
Altitude	max. 1700 m	Occasional altitudinal limits	

Threats

Forest fires and logging of mature Corsican pine stands appear to be the primary threats to this species. Large trees suitable for the species are also favoured by the logging industry and since the 1970s local foresters have attempted to rejuvenate the pine forest by shortening the logging rotation, reducing the size of trees available for the species (Bourcet 1996). It has been estimated that 78-122 territories have been destroyed by logging since 1998, and that a further 50-63 territories were lost during the large forest fires of 2000 and 2003, which severely affected another 47-80 territories (Thibault et al. 2004, 2010). It has been predicted that whenever an area 2 ha is logged in a forest stand suitable for the species, a potential territory is likely to disappear for more than a century due to the slow growth of Corsican Pine (Thibault et al. 2010). This species is potentially susceptible to climate change through sea-level rise and shifts in suitable climatic conditions (affecting Corsican pine distribution), however this is not expected to be a serious direct threat (Barbet-Massin and Jiguet 2011, BirdLife International unpublished data). Climate change may also cause an increase in fire frequency and intensity and so could be a serious future threat to the species (J. Baudat-Franceschi in litt. 2010, Barbet-Massin and Jiguet 2011). Climate change may increase interspecific competition between Corsican pine and Maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*) as well as Mediterranean shrub species which in turn could have a negative effect on the species's range (Thibault et al. 2010, J. Baudat-Franceschi in litt. 2012).

Threats & Impacts					
Threat (level 1)	Threat (level 2)	Impact and Stresses			
		Timing	Scope	Severity	Impact
Biological resource use	Logging & wood harvesting (unintentional effects: (subsistence/small scale) [harvest])	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Slow, Significant Declines	Medium Impact
		Stresses			
		Ecosystem degradation			
Climate change & severe weather	Habitat shifting & alteration	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Unknown	Unknown
		Stresses			
		Ecosystem degradation			
Climate change & severe weather	Other impacts	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Rapid Declines	Low Impact
		Stresses			
		Ecosystem conversion			
Natural system modifications	Increase in fire frequency/intensity	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Slow, Significant Declines	Medium Impact
		Stresses			
		Ecosystem degradation; Species mortality			

Conservation

Conservation Actions Underway

EU Birds Directive Annex I. No conservation action is known, though its national status of Near Threatened in France may afford some protection (IUCN 2008). Almost the entire global population occurs within the Natural Regional Park of Corse (Harrap and de Juana 2013). Work is being conducted by forest managers to evaluate the carrying capacity of Corsican pine forests for the species.

Conservation Actions Proposed

Research the minimum size of a Corsican pine stand required to support a viable population. Prevent the logging of mature Corsican pine. Develop a plan to prevent forest fires. Prevent the clearance of dead and rotting trunks in managed forests.

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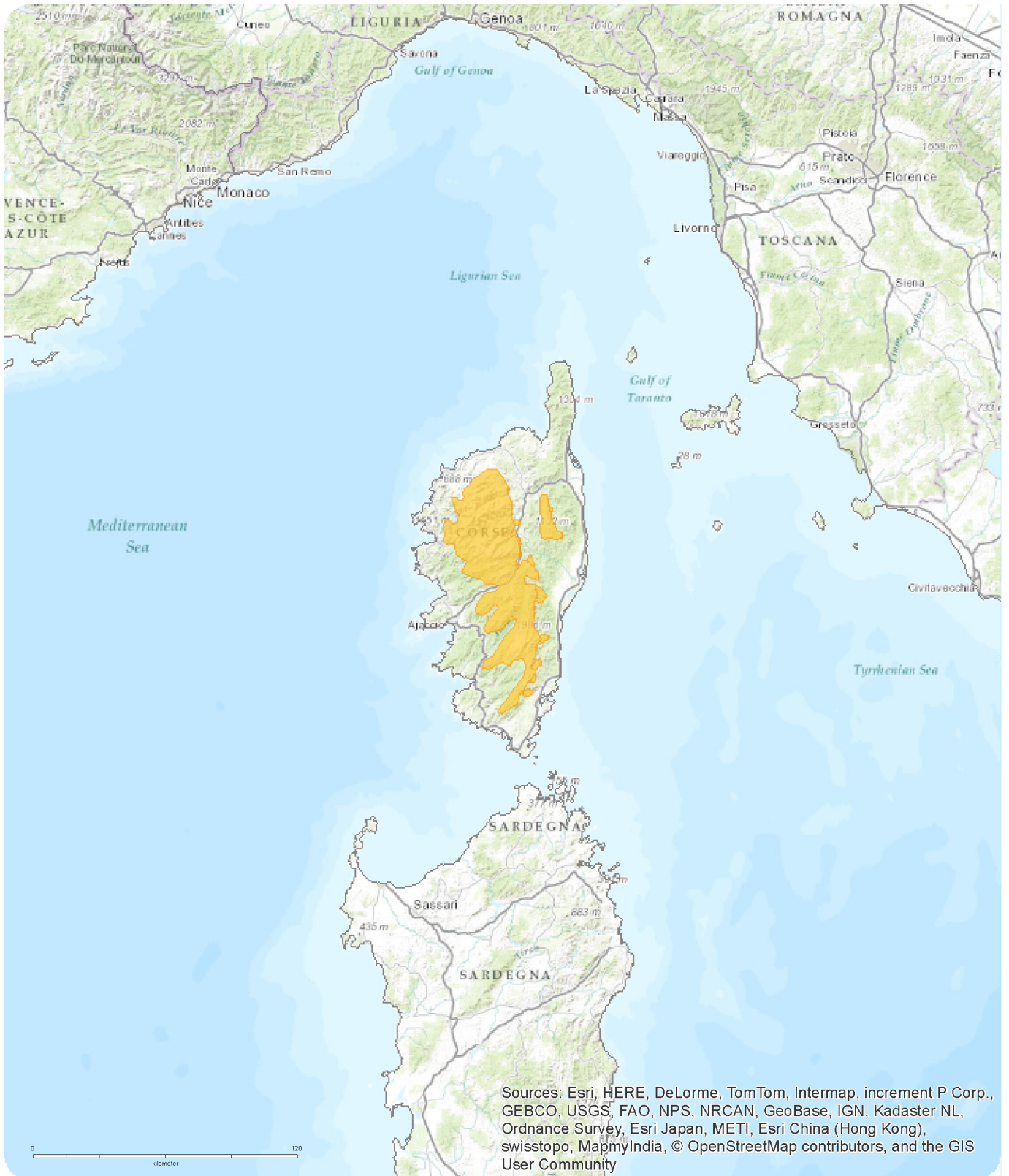
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European Regional Assessment



Sitta whiteheadi

Range

■ Extant (resident)

Citation:
BirdLife International (2015)
European Red List of Birds



Map created 05/12/2015

