

## &gt;&gt; PHOTOSPOT SALINAS MONJITA

# Salinas Monjita

## *Xolmis salinarum*

Adrián Azpiroz

**S**alinas Monjita *Xolmis salinarum* is a Near-Threatened endemic of salt-impregnated soils around Salinas Grandes and Salinas de Ambargasta, in north-west Argentina<sup>1,2,9</sup>. It is locally uncommon to fairly common<sup>9,10</sup>. Though originally described as a subspecies of the more widespread Rusty-backed Monjita *X. rubetra*, it has since been treated specifically by many authors<sup>2,3,5-7,9</sup>.

Salinas Monjita closely recalls Rusty-backed Monjita. The two are allopatric during the breeding season but may co-occur in the non-breeding season when Rusty-backed Monjita moves north from its Patagonian nesting

grounds<sup>2</sup>. Concerning field identification, most diagnostic field marks appear relative. Salinas Monjita is overall smaller (16.5 vs. 18–19 cm) and paler than Rusty-backed Monjita<sup>3,9</sup>. According to some guides<sup>6,8-10</sup>, Salinas is overall whiter due to its mostly white wing-coverts and scapulars and whiter rump, and has almost no streaking on the neck- and breast-sides. The tail is greyer and broadly tipped black. Some sources<sup>8,9</sup> state that Salinas has no rufous on the flanks, but others<sup>3</sup> indicate that it does, albeit very little. According to Ridgely & Tudor<sup>9</sup> a further difference is the presence of an almost complete white nuchal collar in Salinas, which feature is also tangible in



Figure 1. Habitat of Salinas Monjita *Xolmis salinarum*, San Juan de las Salinas, Salinas Grandes, Córdoba province, Argentina (Adrián Azpiroz)

the plate in Narosky & Yzurieta<sup>6</sup>, but is not evident on Plate 100 in Canevari *et al.*<sup>2</sup> or Plate 28 in del Hoyo *et al.*<sup>4</sup>. However, Narosky & Yzurieta<sup>6</sup> consider the white nuchal collar to be not an absolute difference, but merely more conspicuous in Salinas. Very few data are available on sex/age differences. Farnsworth & Langham<sup>3</sup> stated that female Salinas has a more streaked neck whilst Narosky & Yzurieta<sup>6</sup> mentioned that juveniles resemble Rusty-backed even more than adults. A depiction of the female's head pattern included in Hoyo *et al.*<sup>4</sup> highlights a further difference between the sexes: the female's face and upper neck are tinged rusty whilst the male has a basically white face. Until now, the only published photograph appeared in del Hoyo *et al.*<sup>4</sup>. On the basis of available data, one individual depicted here is a male (Fig. 2).

On 16 June 2003 I observed at least six monjitas at the edge of Salinas Grandes, near San Juan de las Salinas, north-west Córdoba province. The birds foraged on the ground and perched on *Allerolpea vaginata* bushes. Some also used these bushes as shelter from the sun. My photographs revealed some variation in plumage. Some birds showed very whitish plumage, as described for adult male Salinas Monjita, but others had varying degrees of rusty on the face, breast and flanks. In these birds the white on the wing was less extensive, but more so than described for Rusty-backed Monjita. They also had a white nuchal collar and, in at least some, the breast was extensively streaked. All individuals had a rufescent crown contrasting with browner upperparts. Most had some rufous on the flanks. The rump, where visible, was whitish. Based on the extensive white wing patch, I believe all were Salinas Monjitas. The different head patterns suggest that both sexes were present. As immatures probably resemble females, it is possible that young birds were also seen. Further observations should seek to further elucidate the plumage variation and field identification of these two closely related taxa.

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Figure 2. Male Salinas Monjita *Xolmis salinarum* showing white face, white breast with almost no streaking and very extensive white wing patch (Adrián Azpiroz)



Figures 3–6. Several individuals thought to be either female or immature (varying degrees of rusty in the face) Salinas Monjita *Xolmis salinarum* (Adrián Azpiroz)