

Sightings of Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* and Red-tailed Shrike *Lanius phoenicuroides* near Rajkot

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Red-backed Shrike Imm.



Red-tailed Shrike Imm.

The Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) and the Red-tailed Shrike (*Lanius phoenicuroides*) are autumn passage migrants in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016, 2017). Both these species are mainly seen in Kachchh from August-end till about first week of November, and there are isolated records of these species from Saurashtra and elsewhere in the state. Ganpule (2018) stated that the Red-tailed Shrike is an uncommon passage migrant in Kachchh and that birds in first-winter plumage are difficult to identify unless seen closely and plumage details noted.

We present here sightings of both these shrike species from Khirasara *vidi*, Rajkot.

Observations

Khirasara *vidi*, near Rajkot, is a grassland dotted with trees and bushes, which includes *Prosopis cineraria*, *Acacia* sp., *Ziziphus* sp. etc. All the shrikes were seen in the Khirasara grassland area. The birds were mostly seen perched in *Acacia* sp. in the morning hours.

Two Red-backed Shrikes were seen during September 2018 in the same area. Both individuals were seen foraging around in typical shrike-like manner, perching on bushes and coming on to the ground to catch prey. The first individual was seen on 4 September 2018 and it was a female Red-backed shrike. Later, a first-winter bird was seen on 29 September 2018. Sightings of Red-backed Shrike are given in Table 1.

Red-tailed Shrike was seen several times in the months of September & October. Sightings of Red-tailed Shrikes are given in Table 2.

Identification

The identification of first-winter shrikes is generally difficult and complicated, and so we took opinions of experts Tim Worfolk and Lars Svensson. Here, we discuss identification of one individual of each species.

Red-backed Shrike: The first -winter Red-backed Shrike can be identified by scaled upperparts, grey nape, and brownish-rufous tail. All these features were seen in this individual. It was thus identified as a first-winter Red-backed Shrike.

Red-tailed Shrike: The individual discussed here had dark grey-brown upperparts and fairly solid mask, which was similar to

Table 1: Sightings of Red-backed Shrike

| Sr. No. | Date | Time | Observers | Remarks |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | 4 September 2018 | 17:18 hrs | Akshay Trivedi, Krunal Trivedi | Adult female |
| 2 | 29 September 2018 | 08:19 hrs | Akshay Trivedi, Krunal Trivedi, Jagrut Rindani | First-winter |

Table 2: Sightings of Red-tailed Shrike

| Sr. No. | Date | Time | Observers | Remarks |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | 10 September 2018 | 18:00 hrs | Raju Karia | Adult male |
| 2 | 23 September 2018 | 07:45 hrs | Akshay Trivedi, Krunal Trivedi | First winter |
| 3 | 30 September 2018 | 07:40 hrs | Akshay Trivedi, Hemanya Radadiya | First winter |
| 4 | 2 October 2018 | 10:14 hrs | Jagrut Rindani | Adult |
| 5 | 10 October 2018 | 08:10 hrs | Akshay Trivedi, Krunal Trivedi | Adult male |

Shrike....

a Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*). However, the wing point/primary projection looked quite long and so, was wrong for a Brown Shrike. Also, the pattern of tertials and greater coverts is different in Brown Shrike. In Red-tailed Shrike, a sub-terminal dark line inside the pale fringes, surrounding a partly paler centre is present as was seen in this bird. Red-backed Shrike was also eliminated due to absence of barring on upperparts. The Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*) was easily ruled out due to brown upperparts and fairly complete black mask. Although the apparently white-sided tail seen in this bird could suggest that it might have some influence of Red-backed Shrike genes (Tim Worfolk, *in litt.* by email) but this can be confirmed only by DNA analysis. So, this was identified as a first-winter Red-tailed Shrike.

The other birds seen here were typical Red-tailed Shrikes. For the other records given in Table 2, we identified the birds as Red-tailed Shrikes using Worfolk (2000) and also sent all the photographs to experts to get the identification confirmed.

These records suggest that both these species are more widespread autumn passage migrants than the records suggest. In first-winter plumage, these shrikes are especially difficult to identify and so are possibly overlooked. But now,

with so many records of both species from areas other than Kachchh, it seems that they are regular passage migrants in Saurashtra too. There are many other areas in Rajkot District which have a habitat which is quite similar to Khirasara *vidi* and it is quite possible that these shrikes could be seen there too. Both the Red-tailed Shrike and Red-backed Shrike should be looked out for in the autumn passage migration season in such areas.

Acknowledgements

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References

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We lost our patron and a senior most birdwatcher from Gujarat Sh. Lalsinhbhai Raol on 21 July this year. A friend, philosopher and guide to many among the bird watcher fraternity of Gujarat, he had graced our society, BCSG, in the capacity of vice president and president for many years. His most important contribution to the Gujarat ornithology was a set of four books on the birds of Gujarat in his trademark, scholarly yet lucid and enjoyable Gujarati. A fatherly figure to the present generation of birdwatchers, he was loved for his humble and unassuming nature. The next issue of 'FLAMINGO Gujarat' will feature his life and work, as a tribute to this legendary birdwatcher of Gujarat.

- Editor