

**Olives as Food for Robins and other Birds.**—In my back yard is a tree bearing small olives, and during the fall and early winter these fell until the ground was black with them. About the first of February the Robins (*Turdus migratorius propinquus*) began gathering in and under the tree to eat the fruit. In a few days there was a large assemblage of birds about the place, and all day long they would stay near. At times as many as a hundred would be seen on the ground underneath the tree, with perhaps half as many perched in the tree. They ate the olives, sometimes appearing to swallow them whole, but at other times picking the flesh off the stones.

Other birds joined the Robins, especially the Golden-crowned Sparrows and Juncos, and occasionally a Steller Jay. In the middle of the day the ground, the tree, and surrounding bushes and trees, would be alive with a scolding, chirping mass of bird life. At one time I counted 150 Robins flying away from the olive tree and nearly as many perched about in other trees.

This unusual sight continued for about two weeks, until all the olives were cleaned up, and nothing left but bleaching stones. Then as suddenly as the birds had come, they disappeared. Now we see only an occasional Robin, as usual. Thinking that perhaps the hard freezing had made the fruit more palatable than usual, I tried it myself, but found it as bitter as ever.—HAROLD W. CLARK, *Angwin, California, March 3, 1930.*

**The Status of *Lanius borealis* as a Species.**—For a number of years, dating from the time of Audubon (Synopsis of the Birds of North America, 1839, p. 157), North American ornithologists have considered *Lanius borealis* Vieillot to be specifically distinct from *Lanius excubitor*, the Great Gray Shrike of Europe. However, Schiebel (Jour. f. Ornithologie, 54, 1906, p. 61), Hartert (Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna, 1, 1910, p. 423), and many other European writers have preferred to designate *borealis* as a subspecies of *L. excubitor*.

In reviewing this question I have endeavored to ascertain specific differences which might serve to separate *L. excubitor mollis* of eastern Siberia from the form *invictus* of Alaska. Pronounced vermiculations on the breast in adults and a white area on the lower eyelid seem to be the only supposed specific characters of *borealis* (and *invictus*) which merit special discussion. Characters such as color of upper parts, extent of basal white area on primaries, and white tipplings on rectrices and remiges are all of but subspecific value in the *Lanius excubitor* group as evinced by much individual variation and repeated instances of racial intergradation involving these characters. It should be recalled that *L. excubitor mollis* does not possess the basal white area on the secondaries that is present in *L. excubitor excubitor*.

Concerning vermiculation of the under parts, Hartert states (*loc. cit.*) that *mollis* is never devoid of at least some vermiculation. On the other hand, some specimens of *invictus* have the vermiculations greatly reduced, although never entirely absent. Consequently, there appears to be an intergradation as concerns this character between *mollis* and *invictus*, a fact pointed out by Hartert, although in connection with *borealis*, in as much as *invictus*, at the time of his writing, was not recognized as a valid race. Ridgway (Birds of North and Middle America, 3, 1904, p. 235) separated the Siberian bird from *borealis* on the basis of the white spot on the lower eyelid of the latter, as well as on the basis of differences in the vermiculation of the under parts. However, I find that in both *borealis* and *invictus* the presence of a white spot is variable, some birds lacking the spot except for one or two white feathers, whereas others have it well developed. Unfortunately, I have not been able to examine specimens of *mollis*, but instead, two adults, male and female, of *L. excubitor excubitor* from western Russia; and specimens of several other Old World races of the same species have been compared closely with *borealis* and *invictus*. Details of bill, foot, wing formula, etc., show close correspondence among birds of the two continents. In fact, closer similarity is to be noted in the shape of the bill of *excubitor* and *borealis* than is to be seen among the races of *L. ludovicianus*.

Consequently there is no valid reason for dissension from the usage of European ornithologists in the matter of extending *excubitor* to include the two American

racés *borealis* and *invictus*. Therefore, *borealis* and *invictus* should become *Lanius excubitor borealis* and *Lanius excubitor invictus*, and these names should be adopted in New World literature.—ALDEN H. MILLER, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, March 19, 1930.*

**Whistling of Snipe.**—In the Condor (xxvi, 1924, p. 175; xxix, 1927, p. 79; xxx, 1928, p. 128) are some interesting observations on the whistling of the Wilson Snipe, by Mr. Ralph Hoffmann, Mr. Aldo Leopold, and Mr. John Main, respectively. Mr. Hoffmann observed that the tail was spread during the dip and believed that to be the source of the sound, Mr. Leopold considers the whistling note is produced vocally, while Mr. Main from his observations believes it is produced by the wing or tail feathers.

In the marshes and paddy fields (fig. 59) of the Philippine Islands snipe occur in incredible numbers during the months from September to February, and an unparalleled opportunity for studying such birds is afforded. Four varieties are found.



Fig. 59. VIEW IN A SNIPE MARSH, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS.

Photo by Lt. F. Christian, U. S. A.

The most abundant is the Swinhoe Snipe (*Capella megala*), while the Pintail and Fantail snipe (*C. stenura* and *C. gallinago*) are less common. The Painted Snipe (*Rostratula capensis*) is a considerably different type of bird in which the female is more brightly colored than the male and is painted with white, olive green, and chestnut, and marked with ocellated ovate spots. This is a larger and slower flying bird than the Swinhoe, Pintail and Fantail snipe and does not resemble the Wilson Snipe closely as the latter three do.

On September 8, 1929, I went hunting in the marshes of Pangasinan Province, Luzon, and observed large numbers of snipe, mostly Swinhoe, making this whistling or, better, winnowing sound. These marshy plains stretch along the foot of the central Cordilleras of the Mountain Province and form vast stretches of muddy paddy fields and grass grown bogs, intersected with streams bordered with wild sugar cane, bamboo and heavy-foliaged trees. One is wading in water and gluey mud constantly and occasionally dodging truculent water buffalos that at times become very threatening and constitute a real menace.

It was during the typhoon season when a storm was brewing some distance away so that the weather was overcast, rainy, and squally, with occasional brisk showers. We were in the marshes by 7:00 a. m. Snipe in great numbers were