

## THE CALIFORNIA SHRIKE IN THE NORTHWEST COASTAL BELT

By JOHN W. SLIPP

In his monograph on the American shrikes, Miller (1931:79) summarized the occurrences of the California Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus gambeli*) in the northwest coastal belt of California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia as follows: "There are records of the race occurring at Humboldt Bay, California (Townsend, 1887, p. 222), at Gray's Harbor, Washington (Lawrence, 1892, p. 46), and in the Chilliwack district (Brewster, 1893, p. 237) and on Vancouver Island (Fannin, 1891, p. 39), British Columbia." Another old record (pointed out by Dr. Miller) is that of Woodcock (1902:83) who listed the species as being uncommon in late fall, winter and spring at Corvallis, Oregon. More recently Jewett (1934:51) has reported a female in breeding condition taken March 19, 1934, and a sight record for April 23, 1922, both in the vicinity of Medford, Oregon; and Edson (1935:13) has recorded a specimen taken April 2, 1931, in the western part of Skagit County, Washington, by E. J. Booth and identified by Dr. Joseph Grinnell. To the above may now be added the following two unpublished records from western Washington.

In the S. F. Rathbun collection at the Washington State Museum at Seattle there are parts of a specimen in an envelope on which is written the following in pencil: "S. F. Rathbun, Seattle, *Lanius l. gambeli*, ok HCO." In ink there is written "California Shrike, what was left of bird brought in by a cat, April 11, 1915. Sex not known. Taken 2 miles north of Seattle city limits." Mr. Rathbun himself tells me that this bird, the first to be taken in western Washington, was actually collected by him on the above date, and that it was spoiled by a cat after having been put in a supposedly safe place over night. As much as could be salvaged was sent to Dr. H. C. Oberholser who confirmed the original identification. I am indebted to Mr. Rathbun for telling me about this record and to him and Mrs. Martha Reekie Flahaut for permission to report it at this time.

A more recent record is that of a young male collected November 24, 1938, on the tideflats at Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington, by the writer. This specimen measured 8.12 inches in length, and is now in the collection of E. A. Kitchin at the College of Puget Sound. On skinning, it was found to have only the left testis developed; the stomach was packed with the remains of insects and some species of small mammal. Dr. Miller has confirmed the original identification in this case, writing me as follows: "The bird is a fairly typical first-year male of the race *gambeli*. There is, perhaps, a little sooting of the white plumage, but nevertheless it clearly shows the characters of this race."

In considering the nine locality records just listed, it may be pointed out that five are based on specimens collected whereas the status of the remaining four (Vancouver Island, Grays Harbor, Corvallis, and Humboldt Bay) is more or less problematical. Concerning the validity of the Vancouver Island occurrence, which was recorded simply as "Vancouver Island, A. H. Maynard" by Fannin (1891:39), Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan has written me under date of October 30, 1940, as follows: "Most of Maynard's specimens are in the Provincial Museum but there is no shrike of this species represented there. Consequently, the record is open to doubt because nowhere in the literature is it definitely stated that the specimen was taken." At Grays Harbor the species was considered by Lawrence (1892:46) to be "Resident? rare," but it seems evident that no specimens were collected, and any sight records he may have had, with one exception to be considered later, were very likely based on the Northern Shrike (*Lanius borealis*)

which is not represented in his list. The latter weakness does not apply to Woodcock's (1902:83) listing of the species *ludovicianus* as uncommon at Corvallis in late fall, winter, and spring, but it is equally true that he did not cite any definite records, nor indicate the nature of his information. In a recent letter from Mr. Jewett it is stated that "Mr. Woodcock died in Corvallis, Oregon, many years ago," so the chance of learning anything further about his records appears remote. Townsend (1887:222) likewise did not state, in recording the species as rare in December at Humboldt Bay, whether or not specimens were taken. Replying to a query on this point, Dr. Townsend writes under date of April 10, 1941, that he does not now remember the facts of the case, "the bird having been taken over half a century ago. The specimen should be in the U. S. National Museum" (italics mine). From this it may be inferred that a specimen probably was collected, but I have been informed that there is no record of such a specimen (nor of any others from the Pacific northwest coastal belt) in the National Museum collections (letter of May 8, 1941, from J. E. Graf, Associate Director).

Of the five records definitely known to be based on collections, four represent March and April birds, while one, the Tacoma specimen, was taken late in November. The latter, therefore, represents the only positive fall record for the coastal belt, at least north of Oregon. The locality in this case is about 1000 miles north and west of the principal winter range ascribed to this race by Miller (1931:79), and the date, November 24, is ten days later than the latest fall date reported by Gabrielson and Jewett (1940:489) for Oregon (Harney County, southeastern quarter of state); these considerations make it seem likely that the bird would have wintered in the northwest had it not been killed. It may be noted incidentally that Mr. Jewett now has a sight record of this species for Oregon, again in Harney County, made December 20, 1935 (personal corresp.).

Seemingly but two of all the records here considered represent the California Shrike as anything more than a casual visitant in the northwest coastal area. Lawrence's (1892:46) belief that it might be resident about Grays Harbor was not considered valid in the discussion above, but his specific report of three shrikes seen June 10, 1890, in a small clearing on the Humptulips River is more acceptable, and suggests that the species may have bred in western Washington in historic times. Such a group at that season would presumably be of a family nature; and the assumption receives some support from the number of west-of-the-mountains records for March and April, when breeding activities should be getting under way. Prima-facie evidence that the species breeds or has bred in the vicinity of Medford in southwestern Oregon is supplied by Jewett's (1934) more recent reports, but the ecological contrast between the Upper Sonoran Zone of that area and the humid Transition of western Washington is notable, and argues against a parallel in the occurrence of breeding shrikes.

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NOTE.—Under the heading *Collyrio borealis*, J. K. Lord, in an article entitled "List of Birds collected by J. K. Lord, F.Z.S., and presented by the British North American Boundary Commission to the Royal Artillery Institution" (Minutes of Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institution, Woolwich, England, 4, 1865:117), lists three collections, as follows:

A male killed at Colville in November measured 10½ in.

One on a high divide above the Osoyoos lakes 9¼ in.

A male on the Sumass prairies measured 9 in., killed in June.

Lord states further that he at first "imagined" that he had two species, but later attributed the differences to age and sex variations. Although the Colville (Washington) bird doubtless was an example of *Lanius borealis*, it appears equally certain that a shrike 9 inches long, taken in June on the Sumas prairies, could only be *L. l. gambeli*, thus constituting the first record of that species for the northwest coastal belt. Also, this and the Osoyoos record are apparently the earliest records of the species in British Columbia, where it is considered (Brooks and Swarth, Pac. Coast Avif. No. 17, 1925:106) only a "rare straggler" into the extreme southern portions of the province. The June occurrence at Sumas bolsters the possibility of the California Shrike's having occasionally bred in the humid northern portions of the coastal belt. Unfortunately the Lord reference was not found until too late for inclusion in the foregoing discussion.

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