

1998

Books

North American Bird Bander

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Recommended Citation

North American Bird Bander (1998) "Books," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 23 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol23/iss1/3>

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Books

SHRIKES. Norbert Lefranc. 1997. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. Hard cover, 192 pp. \$35.00 U.S.

The recent flood of world-wide identification guides for specific groups of birds, such as seabirds, waterfowl and shorebirds, has now reached passerine groupings, and the treatment has expanded to include life history information. This is a welcome addition, as many bird enthusiasts have expanded their interests, and wish to learn more about the birds they see. Many of these guides are being written in Europe and cover groups which occur primarily in the Old World.

Shrikes covers the three genera of the family Laniidae (true shrikes), including 31 species within *Lanius*, *Coruinella* and *Eurocephalus*. Twenty-seven of these species are in the first genus, whose name is the Latin word for butcher, perhaps referring to their habit of hanging prey on spines.

Scientists believe that the family Laniidae evolved in Australia as part of a great radiation that produced the corvids, a number of Australian families, and other groups. Bush-shrikes and helmet-shrikes, once considered part of Laniidae, are now placed in a different family. The present stronghold of the shrike family is in Africa, where 20 species breed and another four winter. Expansion of the range to the New World probably occurred in relatively recent times. Only Loggerhead Shrike is restricted to this hemisphere, as Northern Shrike is considered part of the circumpolar species, Great Grey Shrike.

The attractive color plates by Tim Worfolk provide an average of nearly four full plumage images per species, with additional tail and flight views. They show the strong similarities in appearance among shrikes. All species, except the entirely black Magpie Shrike, have a mask (usually black), hooked bill and a white throat. Frequent plumage features are: long tails, white underparts, gray cap and back, and black wings with white patches.

Some species have bright rufous or sandy caps and backs. A few, such as the Long-tailed Shrike, have striking geographic plumage variations. Some shrikes are as small as House Sparrows.

In 35 pages of introductory material, the author presents information on: taxonomy, overviews of the genera, and a brief guide to the features of the species accounts. The overview of the genus *Lanius* covers: names; morphology, plumages and molts; origins, present distribution, migration and wintering areas; habitat; social organization and general behavior; food habits, larders and foraging behavior; nests, eggs and breeding behavior; population dynamics; population changes and presumed causes; and conservation. The other two genera are covered in single page overviews. Line drawings in the introduction supplement the color plates.

Species accounts average three pages (range 1-9), and include a clear range map (1/4 to 1 page), identification details, measurements, distribution and status, molt, voice, habitat, habits, food, breeding and references. Unfortunately, grouping the references at the end of each account makes further reading on specific topics difficult.

This volume contains a wealth of details on shrikes and 12 pages of references. Since populations of some shrike species are declining for poorly understood reasons, a compilation of information on this family is very timely. Banders working with shrikes will want this useful book.

Robert C. Tweit

