

flew away leaving the prey back.

I waited for half an hour but the shrike did not return. No other predator or scavenger was seen. The feathers from the head, neck and breast had been plucked and there was a curved, incised, wound 8 mm x 1 mm on the back of the head. Apparently it had died from the head wound caused by the sharp beak of the shrike piercing the skull and injuring its brain. I left and returned after about two hours. The dead dove had disappeared.

Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley (HANDBOOK OF

THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, compact edition 1983, page 344) while describing the food of the grey shrike *Lanius excubitor* Linnaeus mention "young or sickly birds (full-grown lark and young Brahminy Myna recorded); known to attack a wounded sandgrouse." In this event the Grey Shrike caught and killed a full-grown, adult dove.

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#### 14. RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE (*LANIUS SCHACH* LINNE) FEEDING A STRIPED KEELBACK (*AMPHIESMA STOLATA*) TO CUCKOO (*CUCULUS CANORUS* LINNE) FLEDGELING

On the 22nd of September, 1991 while watching birds in the New Forest Campus in Dehra Dun I was attracted towards squeaking calls from the compound of a house. Closer observation revealed a young Cuckoo perched on the bare branch of a mango tree some 3 metres above the ground. The presense of a white nuchal spot helped in the identification of the Cuckoo as *Cuculus canorus*. The squeaking calls were feeding calls and in no time a Rufous-backed Shrike arrived and perched by the side of the Cuckoo fledgeling. The Cuckoo responded by increased squeaking, fluttering of wings, and opening the gape which was conspicuously orange on the inside. The shrike fed the Cuckoo fledgeling nearly twice its size with a small insect and flew off. After 3 minutes the shrike returned with a striped keelback about 25 cm long in its beak.

The Cuckoo fledgeling solicited with its usual zeal, and in no time the dead snake was passed on to it by its foster parent. The Cuckoo having a fairly long prey dangling from its beak behaved nervously, shook it many times and also tried to hit it on the branch. While doing so the snake fell from its beak into the tall grass. The Shrike which was watching the scene dived immediately to the ground and retrieved the snake. The Cuckoo once again dropped the snake. The shrike retrieved it again and offered it to the Cuckoo chick. After shaking it a little the Cuckoo started swallowing the snake head first and devoured it completely inside in two minutes.

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#### 15. PHILIPPINE SHRIKE *LANIUS CRISTATUS LUCIONENSIS*, A REGULAR WINTER VISITOR TO SOUTH INDIA

The status of the Philippine shrike *Lanius cristatus lucionensis* in India had been stated by Ali and Ripley (1983) as a winter visitor to Andaman and Nicobar islands. It is recorded in Sri Lanka, but the status is not yet clearly known. However, they suggested that the population of this species occurring in Sri Lanka reaches through Andaman and Nicobar islands. Apart from Andaman and Nicobar islands it is also recorded from Kerala. At Point Calimere the occurrence of the Philippine shrike has been confirmed by ringing more than ten individuals during

October 1991. We believe that this species has been overlooked for many years, though it can be easily differentiated from the brown shrike *Lanius cristatus cristatus*. The differences in the plumage characters were taken as variation due to difference in age. The species was also recorded in Sriharikota island which is situated further north along the east coast (Mohapatra and Santharam 1992). It is evident from the number of birds of both the species ringed, that the population of the Philippine shrike wintering at Point Calimere is almost equal to that of the brown



shrike. In south India these two species have been recorded both along the east and west coasts. The Philippine shrike can be considered as a regular winter visitor to India as is the brown shrike. Peak populations for brown and Philippine shrikes was observed during their autumn passage which indicate that the wintering population of Sri Lanka may pass through Point Calimere also.

It also supports the suggestion made by Ripley (1982), that the brown shrike which breeds in the Khasi Hills and North Cachar may be the subspecies *L. lucionensis*.

May 7, 1992

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### 16. COMMON MYNAS DRINKING SEA WATER

On Fregate Island (202 ha), Seychelles, between 31 January and 12 February 1992, pairs and small parties of Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* (Linn.) fed regularly on the beach, both on sandy beaches and on beach limestone within the lagoon when exposed at low tide. The identity of the food items taken was not determined but the feeding methods used by Mynas suggested that a diversity of food types was taken: Mynas picked food items from the surface of the limestone, pried under stones, turned over seaweed and chased or pounced on presumably more mobile prey.

During these studies maximum temperatures reached 34°C each day and during the hottest part of the day (approximately 1100 h to 1500 h), Mynas that were feeding on the shore were regularly seen to drink from small pools in the beach limestone. Between feeding bouts, birds walked to the edge of these pools, lowered the beak into the water and then lifted the head in typical "dip and tilt" (Campbell and Lack 1985) drinking fashion. The number of such movements observed within a drinking bout ranged from 1 to 7.

No facilities were available for measuring water temperature or salinity in these pools but while most Mynas drank from pools close to the water's edge, some drank from pools in the upper shore where the water was very warm to the touch and tasted very saline.

The drinking of sea water on Fregate Island took place despite the availability of fresh water in a small river, in rain-water pools and in water troughs and other standing water around a pig sty. I have failed to find reference to this behaviour in the literature on Common Mynas (Ali and Ripley 1972, Sengupta 1982) and while the drinking of sea water is well known in seabirds, which have salt glands enabling them to excrete excess salt (Campbell and Lack 1985), the drinking of sea water by Mynas is surprising since they lack salt glands and might therefore subject themselves to osmotic stress.

July 1, 1992

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Balachandran, S. and Rajan, A Alagar. 1994. "Philippine Shrike Lanius Cristatus Lucionensis, Regular Winter Visitor To South India." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 91, 143–144.

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