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The birds of America

Audubon, John James

New York, 1856

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Family XIX.-Laniinae. Shrikes.

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with blue; seven of the secondaries largely tipped with white, upper tail-coverts greyish-black; tail pure white, excepting the two middle feathers and the greater part of the inner webs of the next pair, which are black, glossed with blue; lower wing-coverts dusky, some tipped with white; lower tail-coverts pure white.

Length to end of tail 12 inches; bill along the ridge $1\frac{8}{12}$, along the edge of lower mandible $1\frac{0}{12}$; wing from flexure $7\frac{1}{12}$; tail $5\frac{1}{4}$; tarsus $1\frac{4}{12}$; hind toe $\frac{7}{12}$, its claw $\frac{8}{12}$; middle toe $\frac{1}{12}$, its claw $\frac{6}{12}$.

The female is similar to the male.

FAMILY XIX.—LANIINÆ. SHRIKES.

Bill short, of moderate length, stout, broader than high at the base, compressed toward the end; the gap-line slightly arched, the ridge narrow, the notch and dentiform process large, the tip narrow and decurved. Head large, roundish, ovate; neck short; body compact. Legs of moderate length; tarsus compressed, with seven anterior scutella; toes moderate, compressed; hind toe rather stout, lateral about equal, the outer adherent at the base. Claws arched, compressed, acute. Plumage soft and blended. Bristles rather strong. Wings and tail various. Roof of upper mandible narrow, with a median ridge; tongue slender, concave above, horny toward the end, with the margins lacerated, and the tip slit; œsophagus wide, uniform; proventriculus elliptical; stomach broadly elliptical or roundish; its muscular coat thin, the epithelium dense and longitudinally rugous; intestine of moderate length; cœca very small; cloaca oblong or globular. Trachea simple; four pairs of inferior laryngeal muscles.

GENUS I.—LANIUS, *Linn.* SHRIKE, or BUTCHER-BIRD.

Bill of moderate length, strong, compressed; upper mandible with the dorsal line a little arched, towards the end decurved, the sides convex, the edges direct, with a large prominence succeeded by a deep notch, the tip decurved and acute; lower mandible with the angle short and wide, the dorsal line convex, the sides convex, the edges inflected, the tip ascending, acute. Nostrils basal, lateral, oval, concealed by the bristly feathers. Head large, broadly ovate; neck short; body robust. Tarsus rather short, compressed, slender, with eight scutella; toes small, the first stout, the lateral nearly equal. Claws rather large, arched, compressed, extremely acute. Plumage soft and blended. Bristles stiff. Wings of ordinary length, first quill very short, fourth longest. Tail long, graduated, or rounded.

THE GREAT AMERICAN SHRIKE.

LANIUS BOREALIS, *Vieill.*

PLATE CCXXXVI.—MALE, FEMALE, AND YOUNG.

Although this species spends the greater part of the year in our most Eastern States, and in countries still farther north, many individuals remain in the mountainous districts of the Middle States, and breed there. In severe winters, it migrates as far south as the neighbourhood of the city of Natchez, on the Mississippi, where I have shot several and seen many more. In Kentucky it is not a rare bird at that season, but along the coasts of our Southern States I have never met with it, nor have I heard of its having been seen there.

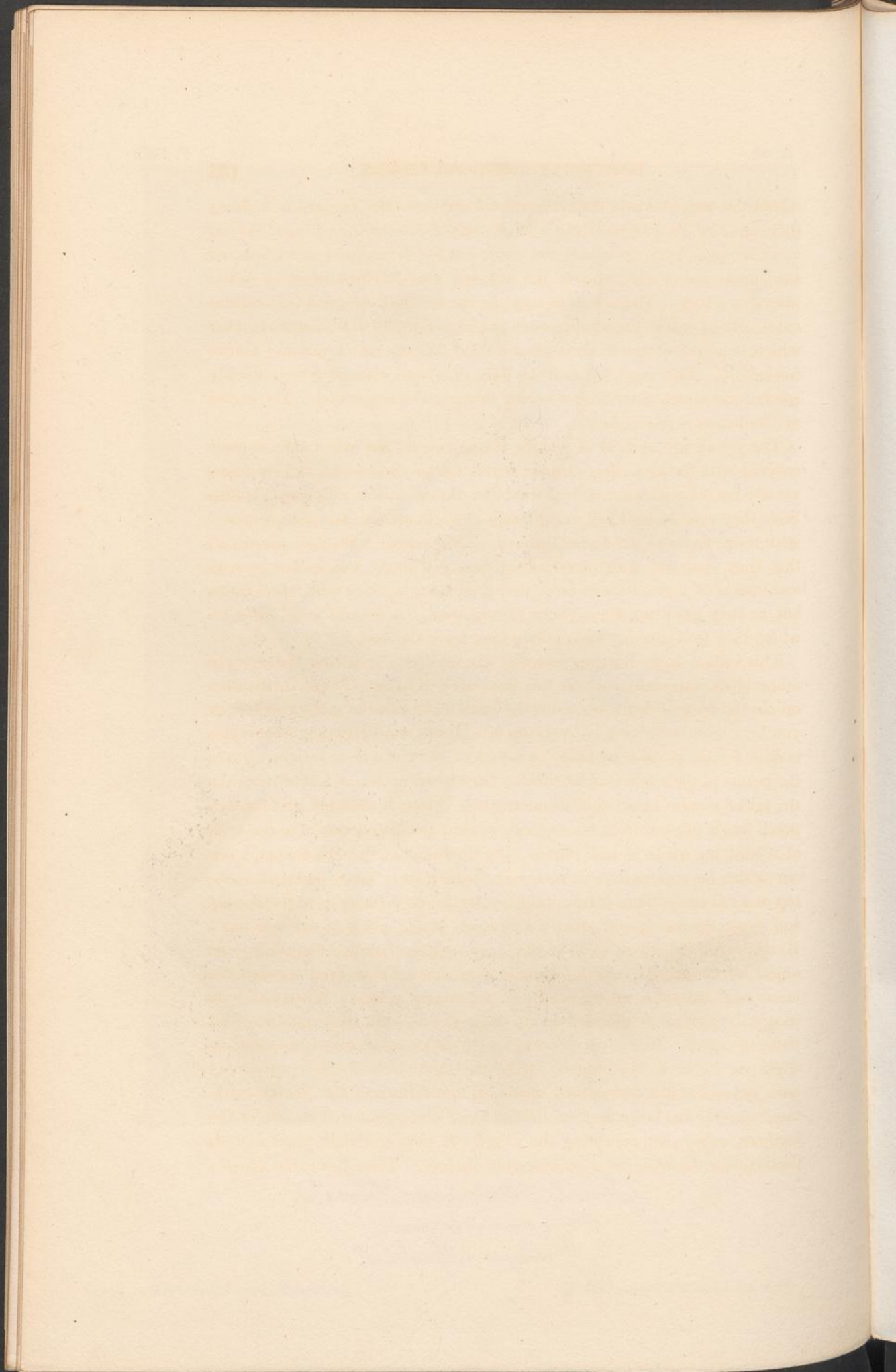
In spring and summer it retires from the low lands of the Middle States to the mountainous districts, where it generally remains until autumn.



Great American Shrike.

1. Male 2. Female 3. Young.

Crataegus Agrifolia.



About the 20th of April, the male and his mate are seen engaged in building their nest, in the covered and secluded parts of the forests. I found several of their nests placed on bushes not above ten feet from the ground, without any appearance of choice as to the tree, but generally towards the top, and placed in a fork. The nest is as large as that of the Robin, and is composed externally of coarse grasses, leaves and moss, internally of fibrous roots, over which is a bed of the feathers of the Wild Turkey and Pheasant (*Tetrao umbellus*). The eggs are four or five, of a dull cinereous tint, thickly spotted and streaked with light brown towards the larger end. The period of incubation is fifteen days.

The young are at first of a dark bluish colour, but when they become covered with feathers, they assume a dull rufous tint above, and are transversely barred with zig-zag lines from the throat to the abdomen. In this State they remain until late in autumn, and might seem to one not acquainted with them to be of a different species. They remain with their parents all that time, and not unfrequently even during winter. Caterpillars, spiders and insects of various kinds form their first food, together with small fruits; but as they grow up, their parents bring them the flesh of small birds, on which they feed greedily even before they leave the nest.

This valiant little warrior possesses the faculty of imitating the notes of other birds, especially such as are indicative of pain. Thus it will often mimic the cries of Sparrows and other small birds, so as to make you believe you hear them screaming in the claws of a Hawk; and I strongly suspect this is done for the purpose of inducing others to come out from their coverts to the rescue of their suffering brethren. On several occasions I have seen it in the act of screaming in this manner, when it would suddenly dart from its perch into a thicket, from which there would immediately issue the real cries of a bird on which it had seized. On the banks of the Mississippi, I saw one which for several days in succession had regularly taken its stand on the top of a tall tree, where it from time to time imitated the cries of the Swamp and Song Sparrows, and shortly afterwards would pitch downwards like a Hawk, with its wings close to its body, seldom failing in obtaining the object of its pursuit, which it would sometimes follow even through the briars and brambles among which it had sought refuge. When unable to secure the prey, it would reascend to its perch, and emit loud and discordant notes of anger. Whenever I could see it strike its victim, it appeared to alight on its back, and instantly strike its head, which on such occasions I have several times found torn open. If not disturbed, the Shrike would then tear up the body, and swallow in large pieces, not well cleared of the feathers, every part excepting the wings. It now and then pursues birds that are on the wing to a considerable distance. Thus, I saw one follow a

Turtle Dove, which, on being nearly caught, pitched on the ground, where its skull was bruised in a moment; but the next instant both birds were in my possession.

The courage, activity, and perseverance of this species, are quite surprising. In winter, when insects are scarce, and small birds rare in the Eastern States, I have known it to enter the cities and attack birds in cages. During my stay at Boston, several of them were brought to me, that had been caught in the apartments in which cages containing Canaries were kept, and in every instance after the little favourite had been massacred. Near the same city I observed an individual poised on wing, in the manner of our Sparrow Hawk, for several minutes at a time, over the withered grass and sedges of salt water meadows, when it suddenly pounced on some small bird concealed there.

Although its feet are small and apparently weak, its claws are sharp, and it is capable of inflicting a pretty severe wound on the finger or hand. It bites with great pertinacity, and will seldom let go its hold unless its throat is squeezed.

Its flight is strong, swift, and sustained: it moves through the air in long undulations which have each an extent of twenty or thirty yards, but it seldom rises very high, unless for the purpose of obtaining a good point of observation, and in its usual flight merely passes over the tops of the low bushes rapidly and in silence, in starts of from fifty to a hundred yards. I never saw one walk or move on the ground.

They are extremely fond of crickets and grasshoppers, as well as other kinds of insects, and they feed on the flesh of birds whenever they can procure it. The individuals which I have kept in cages, appeared well pleased with pieces of fresh beef, but they generally remained dull and sullen until they died. As it was only during winter that I had them in confinement, when no coleopterous insects could be procured, I had no opportunity of observing if, like Hawks, they have the power of throwing up hard particles of the food which they swallow, although I should suppose this to be the case. Their propensity to impale insects and small birds on the sharp points of twigs and on thorns, which they so frequently do at all seasons of the year, is quite a mystery to me, as I cannot conceive what its object may be.

I have represented three of these birds of different sexes and ages, and therefore differing in colour and size.

GREAT AMERICAN SHRIKE OR BUTCHER-BIRD, *Lanius Excubitor*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 74.

LANIUS SEPTENTRIONALIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 72.

LANIUS BOREALIS, *Greater Northern Shrike*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 111.

GREAT AMERICAN SHRIKE, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 258.

GREAT AMERICAN SHRIKE, *Lanius Excubitor*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 534; vol. v. p. 434.

Fourth quill longest, third little shorter, second shorter than sixth, first half the length of second; tail long, graduated; bill brownish-black at the end, paler towards the base; upper parts light ash-grey, the ends of the scapulars and the upper tail-coverts greyish-white; a streak of whitish over the eye; loreal space and a patch behind the eye brownish-black; first row of smaller wing-coverts, larger coverts, and quills, brownish-black; secondary quills and coverts edged and tipped with whitish; base of primaries white, forming a conspicuous patch when the wing is extended; tail-feathers brownish-black, outer web of lateral feathers, and more than a third of its inner web from the tip, white; the extremities of all the rest, excepting the middle two, also white, gradually occupying less extent on the inner feathers; lower parts greyish-white, the fore part of the breast tinged with brown, and faintly marked with transverse undulating lines of dark grey, as are the sides. Female similar, but with the head and neck slightly tinged with brown, and the lower parts more banded.

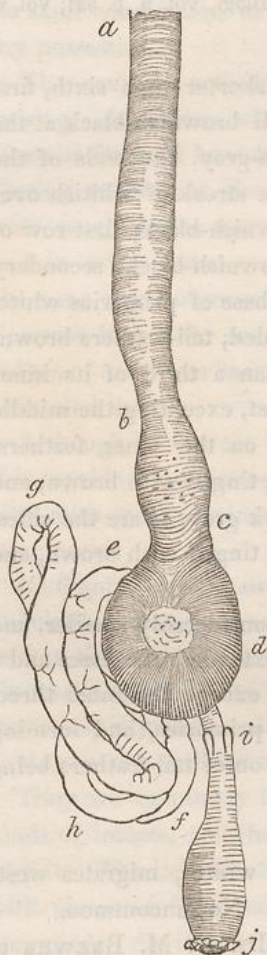
Lanius Excubitor of Europe differs in being considerably smaller, and in having the white on the wings and tail more extended, the bases and a great portion of the inner webs of the secondaries, except the inner three, being of that colour, as well as the bases of the primaries, and forming a conspicuous spot when the wing is closed, and the outer tail-feathers being often white in their whole length.

Male, $10\frac{2}{12}$, $14\frac{2}{12}$.

Breeds from Pennsylvania northward. During winter, migrates westward to the Mississippi, and as far south as Natchez. Not uncommon.

The dimensions of an adult male presented by Dr. T. M. BREWER of Boston, and preserved in spirits, are:—Length to end of tail $10\frac{2}{12}$ inches, to end of wings $7\frac{5}{12}$, to end of claws $8\frac{2}{12}$; extent of wings $14\frac{2}{12}$; wing from flexure $4\frac{8}{12}$; tail $4\frac{8}{12}$.

The roof of the mouth is nearly flat, with a median prominent ridge anteriorly, and two papillate ridges behind. The posterior aperture of the nares is 7 twelfths long; the tongue is slender, 7 twelfths long, emarginate and papillate at the base, concave above, horny toward the end, the margins lacerated, the tip slit. The width of the mouth is $7\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths. The œsophagus, *a b c*, is 2 inches 10 twelfths long, of considerable width, having an average breadth of 4 twelfths; the proventriculus, *b c*, 5 twelfths in width, its glands forming a belt only 3 twelfths in breadth. The stomach, *d e*, is broadly elliptical, 11 twelfths long, $9\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths broad; its muscular coat thin, being composed of strong parallel fasciculi, its thickest part not exceeding 1



twelfth; the epithelium thin, tough, reddish-brown, longitudinally rugous. The pylorus is very small, with a semilunar margin. The intestine, *e f g h i j*, is 12 inches long, its greatest width 3 twelfths, the least 2 twelfths; the cæca, *i*, 2 twelfths long, and scarcely $\frac{1}{2}$ twelfth wide, their distance from the extremity 1 inch; the cloaca, *j*, oblong; its width about 6 twelfths. The stomach contained portions of a mouse, including two front teeth.

The trachea is 2 inches 4 twelfths long, 2 twelfths broad at the upper part, $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths at the lower; its rings about 55, with 2 dimidiate rings; it is considerably flattened below, but roundish at the upper part. The bronchi are of moderate size, with about 12 half rings. The muscles are as in the Thrushes, there being four pairs of inferior laryngeal, of large size.

In another individual, the tongue is 7 twelfths long, the mouth 8 twelfths in width; the œsophagus 3 inches long, its average width $3\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths; the intestine 12 inches long. The lobes of the liver are very unequal, the left smaller. The aperture of the ear of moderate size, roundish, 2 twelfths in

diameter. The contents of the stomach were a small bird and some insects.

CRATEGUS APHIFOLIA, *Mich. Fl. Amer.*, vol. i. p. 287. *Pursh, Fl. Amer. Sept.*, vol. i. p. 336.—*ICOSANDRIA PENTAGYNIA*, *Linn.*—*ROSACEÆ*, *Juss.*

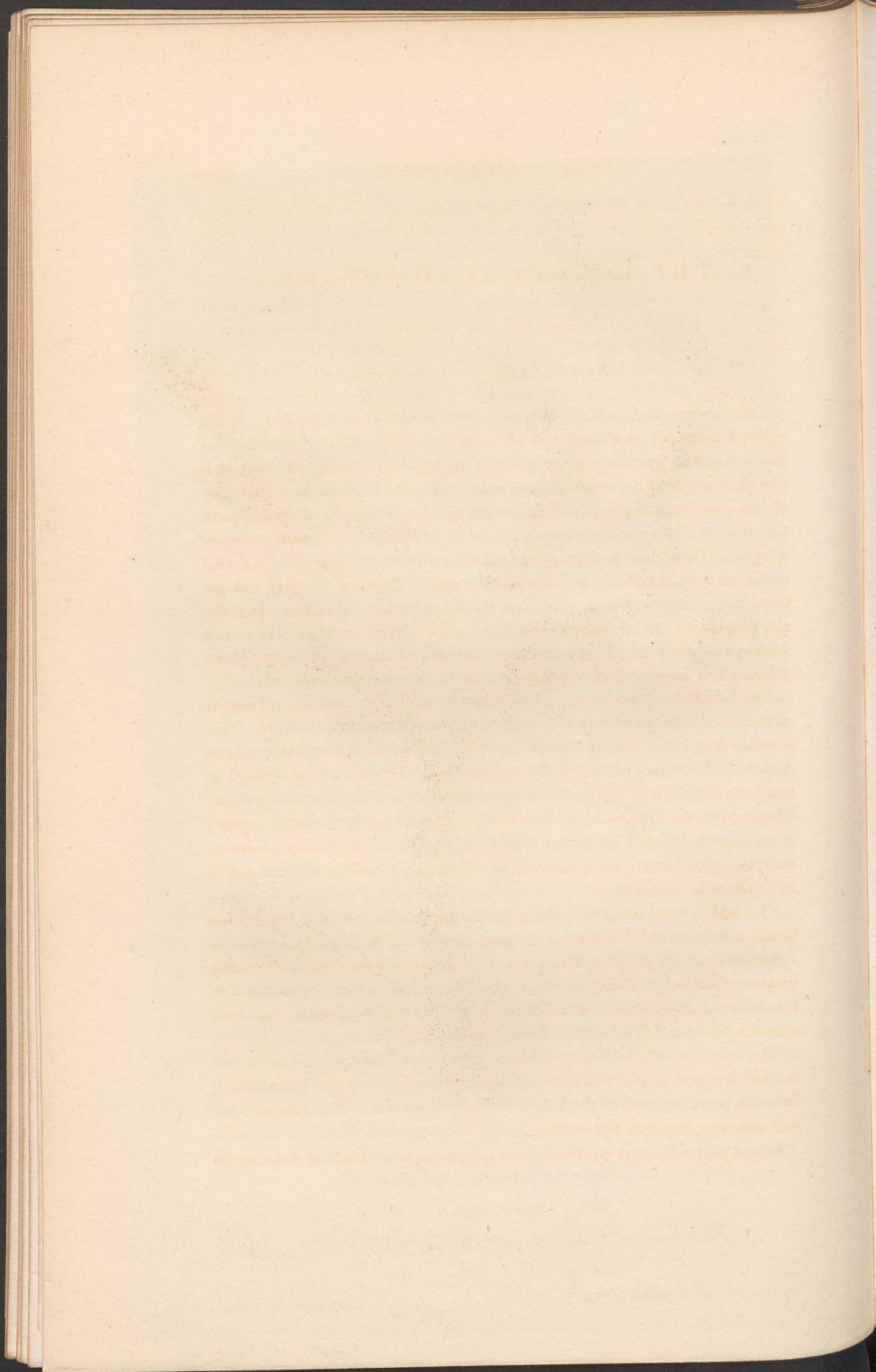
This species of *hawthorn* bears a great resemblance to that so common in Europe. It grows on the banks of rivers and in damp woods in several of the Southern States, and attains a height of twelve or fifteen feet. The leaves are somewhat triangular in their general outline, inciso-lobate, the lobes acute and deeply toothed; the flowers white, and the berries ovate or oblong, of a deep red colour.



Loggerhead Shrike?

1. Male. 2. Female.

Greenbrier or Round-leaved Smilax Smilax Rotundifolia.



THE LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE.

LANIUS LUDOVICIANUS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCXXXVII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

This species may with great propriety be called an inhabitant of the "Low Countries," as it is seldom or never met with even in the vicinity of the mountains intersecting the districts in which it usually resides. It is also confined to that portion of our country usually known under the name of the Southern States, seldom reaching farther eastward than North Carolina, or farther inland than the State of Mississippi, in which latter, as well as in Louisiana, it appears only during the winter months. Its chief residence may, therefore, be looked upon as the Floridas, Georgia, and the Carolinas. In these States, it is seen along the fences and bushes about the rice plantations, at all seasons, and is of some service to the planter, as it destroys the field-mice in great numbers, as well as many of the larger kinds of grubs and insects, upon which it pounces in the manner of a Hawk.

The Loggerhead has no song, but utters a shrill clear creaking prolonged note, resembling the grating of a rusty hinge slowly moved to and fro. This sound is heard only during the spring season, and whilst the female is sitting. About the beginning of March these birds begin to pair. They exhibit at this time few of those marks of the tender affection which birds usually shew. The male courts the female without much regard, and she, in return, appears to receive his haughty attentions with merely just as much condescension as enables her to become the mother of a family, whose feelings are destined to be of the same cold nature.

The nest is fixed in a low bush, generally near the centre of a dwarf hawthorn, and is so little concealed as to be easily discovered. It is coarsely constructed of dry crooked twigs, and is lined with fibrous roots and slender grasses. The eggs, which are of a greenish-white, are from three to five. Incubation is performed by the male as well as by the female, but each searches for its own food during the intervals of sitting.

The young are at first fed on crickets, grasshoppers, and other insects; but as they become larger and stronger, they receive portions of mice, which form the principal food of the grown birds at all seasons. The Loggerheads rear only one brood in the season.

Whilst this species is on wing, its motions are very rapid and direct, its

flight being produced by quick flutterings of the wings, without any apparent undulation. The bird alights in a sudden firm manner, like a Hawk, stands erect, silent and watchful, until it spies its prey on the ground, when it suddenly pounces upon it, striking it first *with its bill*, but seizing it with its claws so immediately after, that the most careful observation alone can enable one to decide as to the priority of either action. I have never seen it attack birds, nor stick its prey on thorns in the manner of the Great American Shrike.

This bird appears in Louisiana only at intervals, and seldom remains more than a few weeks in December or January. It never comes near houses, although it frequents the fields around them. It has no note at this period, and appears singly, alighting on the stacks and fences, where it stands perched for a considerable time, carefully looking around over the ground. As soon as the spot is thoroughly examined, it flies off to another, and there renews its search.

I have received specimens of our Loggerhead Shrike, of both sexes and of various ages, from Mr. TOWNSEND, who procured them on the Rocky Mountains and in the Columbia river district. These specimens are in no respect different from those which I have obtained in South Carolina, where it is plentiful. That this species should occur on both sides of the continent is not very remarkable, as several other birds are in the same predicament. The Fish Crow, for example, affords a more striking instance, as it is rarely found beyond the maritime districts; whereas the Loggerhead Shrike extends its movements far inland in the States of Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana. This species has been given as new, under the name of *Lanius Excubitoroides*, in the Fauna Boreali-Americana; but the description and figure indicate nothing peculiar; and the nest and eggs described by Mr. DRUMMOND, especially the latter, are similar to those of the Carolina-bird.

My account of the habits of this species being meagre, I have great pleasure in laying before you the observations of my friend the Rev. Dr. BACHMAN, who has had much better opportunities of studying them. "Your description of this bird requires, I think, many additions. You say it has no song. This is true in part, but it has other notes than the grating sounds you attribute to it. During the breeding season, and indeed nearly all summer, the male ascends some cedar or other tree, and makes an effort at a song, which I cannot compare to anything nearer than the first attempts of a young Brown Thrush. He seems to labour hard, making as it were almost painful exertions. At times the notes are not unpleasing, but very irregular.

"You speak of the male shewing but little attachment to the female. I have thought differently, and so would you were you to watch him carrying every now and then a grasshopper or cricket to her, pouncing upon the

Crow and even the Buzzard, that approach his nest, and invariably driving these intruders away. Indeed I consider these birds as evidencing great attachment toward each other.

"I have usually found the nest on the outer limbs of a tree, frequently the live-oak, sometimes the black-gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and often on a cedar, from fifteen to thirty feet from the ground. Once only I saw it lower, on the toothache bush, *Xanthoxylum*, about ten feet high.

"I have occasionally seen this bird with young mice in its mouth, and have found it feeding on birds that had apparently been wounded by the sportsman. It sometimes catches young birds and devours them; but I am induced to think, from the observation of many years, that the food of the Loggerhead Shrike consists principally of insects. Grasshoppers and crickets are preferred; coleopterous and other insects are also frequently seized; and I have seen it catch moths and butterflies on wing. This bird has the same propensity as the Northern Shrike, to stick grasshoppers and other insects on thorns. I have seen one occupy himself for hours in sticking up in this way a number of small fishes that the fishermen had thrown on the shore; but I never found either this or the Northern Shrike return to seek this prey for food at any other time; but on the contrary, the fishes dried up and decayed. I have seen them alight on the same thorn-bush afterwards, but never make use of this kind of food. May it not be the same propensity which Jays have, who conceal nuts and grain, and apparently do not return to devour them?"

"The Loggerheaded Shrike is partially migratory in Carolina. A few may be found through the winter; but the number is ten times greater in summer; and such is also the case with the Mocking-bird. It appears fond of the little changeable Green Lizard (*Anolis Carolinensis*, Cuv.), and I have seen exertions of skill and activity on the one part in seizing, and on the other in avoiding their enemy, but the reptile, in spite of all its agility, is frequently secured. On one occasion I had marked a lizard of this species on a fence. It was then beautifully green; but on being chased by a Shrike, which observing me flew off, I found that it had become quite brown.

"This species breeds twice in a season, lays four and sometimes five white eggs. Occasionally it feeds on the small black berries of a species of *Smilax*; this is in winter, when it is probably pinched for food. I have noticed it building its nest in the same tree for a succession of years, never repairing an old nest but always building a new one."

According to Mr. SWAINSON this species is found on the table-land of Mexico, where it is very common.

I have given you, kind reader, the representation of a pair of these Shrikes, contending for a mouse. The difference of plumage in the sexes is

scarcely perceptible; but I have thought it necessary to figure both, in order to shew the quarrelsome disposition of these birds even when united by the hymeneal band.

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE, *Lanius Carolinensis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iii. p. 57.

LANIUS LUDOVICIANUS, Bonap. Syn., p. 72.

LANIUS EXCUBITOROIDES, *American Grey Shrike*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 115.

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 261.

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE, *Lanius ludovicianus*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 300; vol. v. p. 435.

Third quill longest, fourth scarcely shorter, second and sixth equal; tail rather long, graduated; bill black, upper parts deep leaden-grey, lower greyish-white, the sides bluish-grey; a streak of whitish over the eye, and margining the forehead; loreal space, and a patch behind the eye, black; posterior scapulars almost entirely white; quills and coverts black, secondaries narrowly tipped with white; bases of primaries white, forming a conspicuous patch on the extended wing; tail-feathers black, all except the middle pair white at the end, that colour occupying nearly two-thirds of the outer, and gradually diminishing on the rest. Female with the plumage somewhat darker. Young brownish-white beneath, the breast and sides transversely barred with dark grey.

Male, $8\frac{1}{2}$, 13.

From Louisiana to Carolina, laterally to the Columbia river, and northward to the Fur Countries. Abundant. Resident in the south. Migratory in the north.

A male preserved in spirits measures $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length; extent of wings 12; wing from flexure 4; tail $4\frac{1}{2}$.

The roof of the mouth is as in the other species; its width 7 twelfths; the tongue is 6 twelfths, the posterior aperture of the nares 5 twelfths. The lobes of the liver are very unequal, the right being the largest. The œsophagus is $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, 4 twelfths in width, but on entering the thorax contracting to $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths; the proventriculus 3 twelfths. The stomach is irregularly elliptical, a little compressed; the muscles thin, especially the lower; the epithelium thin, tough, brownish-red, with longitudinal rugæ. The intestine is 9 inches long, from 3 twelfths to 1 twelfth wide; the cœca extremely small, $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths long, $\frac{1}{4}$ twelfth wide; the cloaca small and oblong.

The trachea is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, moderately flattened, $1\frac{3}{4}$ twelfths broad at the commencement, 1 twelfth at the lower part; the rings firm, about 56, with 2 dimidiate rings. The lateral muscles are very slender, as are the sterno-tracheal, and there are four pairs of inferior laryngeal muscles on each

side, forming a large pad, as in the Thrushes. In this respect the Shrikes resemble the *Turdinæ* and *Sylvianæ*, much more than the Flycatchers, of which the inferior laryngeal muscles are small and blended. The bronchi are moderate, of about 12 half rings.

THE GREEN BRIAR, OR ROUND-LEAVED SMILAX.

SMILAX ROTUNDIFOLIA, *Willd.*, Sp. Pl., vol. iv. p. 779. *Pursh*, Flor. Amer., vol. i. p. 250.
—DICECIA HEXANDRIA, *Linn.*—ASPARAGI, *Juss.*

This species of *smilax*, which is common along fences, in old fields, and by the borders of woods, is characterized by its shrubby stem, round branches, roundish-ovate, acuminate, slightly cordate, five or seven-nerved leaves, and spherical berries. It flowers in May and June. The berries are of a dark purple colour.

THE FIELD MOUSE.

This species is found in all parts of the United States, living in the meadows and woods. It forms narrow subterranean passages, to which it resorts on the least appearance of danger, but from which it is easily driven, by thrusting a twig into them.