

## First record of Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) in British Columbia.

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### Introduction and Distribution

The Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) is a small species that is found throughout East Asia breeding south of the northern tundra from Eastern Chukotka Peninsula, Kamchatka Peninsula, Sea of Okhotsk, Japan, Korea, China, from northern Mongolia westward into Central Siberia approximately Yenisei and Anadyr Rivers (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Brazil 2009, Pyle *et al.* 2015). This species is highly migratory throughout its vast range. The Brown Shrike winters from India to southern China, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Lewington *et al.* 1992).

There are 4 subspecies of Brown Shrike found throughout this species range. These include the nominate subspecies of Brown Shrike is (*Lanius cristatus cristatus*) which is found breeding from eastern Siberia to northwestern Mongolia. This subspecies is highly migratory and travels far to the wintering grounds (Pyle *et al.* 2015). This subspecies winters in India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladeshi, Burma, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, southern Vietnam and the Malayan Peninsula (Pyle *et al.* 2015, Clements *et al.* 2016). The first Alaska record was tentatively identified as (*L. c. lucionensis*) (Gibson 1981), but has subsequently been identified as nominate (*L. c. cristatus*) (Gibson and Withrow 2015). This is the subspecies that now widely accepted as the subspecies that accounts for most, if not all North American records (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The second subspecies of Brown Shrike is (*Lanius cristatus confuses*) which is found breeding in Manchuria and Amurland (Clements *et al.* 2016). This subspecies winters in Southeast Asia on the Malayan Peninsula and Sumatra (Clements *et al.* 2016). The third subspecies, sometimes given full species status in some literature, is called Philippine Shrike (*Lanius cristatus lucionensis*) which breeds in Korea and eastern China. This subspecies winters in Taiwan, throughout the Philippines, south to Borneo, and Sulawesi (Clements *et al.* 2016). The fourth subspecies, sometimes given full species status in some literature, is called the Japanese Shrike (*Lanius cristatus superciliosus*) which is found breeding from coastal Russian Far East, southern Sakhalin Island and throughout Japan (Brazil 2009, Clements *et al.* 2016). This subspecies winters in Sumatra and the Lesser Sundas (Clements *et al.* 2016).

The Brown Shrike is a casual spring and fall migrant vagrant species in Alaska from widely scattered locations such as Gambell, Shemya Island, Attu Island, Anchorage and Sitka where there are 17 records (West 2008, Pyle *et al.* 2015). South of Alaska, the Brown Shrike is an accidental vagrant migrant species. In British Columbia, there is a recent photographed fall record from Haida Gwaii (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). All other records come from California, where there are 4 accepted records by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2017). There is also a recent record of a bird originally reported as a Brown

Shrike that is now widely accepted as a likely hybrid Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) x Turkestan Shrike (*L. phoenicuroides*) that was found and photographed at Manchester State Park, in Mendocino County, California from March 5-April 22, 2015 (Pyle *et al.* 2015, Tietz and McCaskie 2017).

The Brown Shrike is an accidental vagrant to Europe with a few well documented records (Lewington *et al.* 1992). Incredibly, the Brown Shrike is an accidental species to Nova Scotia, where an adult that was photographed in Halifax Harbour from November 23-December 1, 1997 (McLaren 2012).

### **Identification and Similar Species**

The identification of the Brown Shrike is covered in most North American Field Guides. The Brown Shrike is small shrike species measuring 19 cm in length (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The plumage colouration and size makes this species obvious in comparison with the much larger Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) which measures 25 cm in length and the larger Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) which measures 23 cm in length (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). A Potential vagrant to North America that could cause confusion with the Brown Shrike is the Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) (Brazil 2009). This species has not been recorded officially in North America, however a suspected hybrid has been documented in California, but the identification is out of the scope of this article (Pyle *et al.* 2015). For further hints on identification and separating these species from each other it is recommended to read Lewington *et al.* (1992), Brazil (2009), Mullarney and Zetterstrom (2009), and Pyle *et al.* (2015).

Adult males have a distinct white border above a black mask that extends across the forehead. The crown, nape and back are a warm brown. The black bill is short, thick and hooked. The eyes are large and dark (Brazil 2009). Below the black mask has a white throat, and pale belly and undertail-coverts. Along the sides of the breast and flanks is a warm buff. The tail is a warm brown. This back is brown extends down onto the rump and the uppertail-coverts which are a brighter brown. The wings are brown with light edges to the feathers. The tertials have dark centered feather with light brownish edges. There are no distinct wingbars. The legs and feet are gray.

Adult females are similar to adult males, but the black mask is less solid black. There is also some barring along the sides and flanks.

Juvenile plumage is retained in throughout the fall and into the early winter (Lewington *et al.* 1992). These birds have a pale base to the bill with a black tip. There is no white above the bill on the forehead as is found on adult birds. The black mask is less distinct and there is brown malar stripe. There is a white line from the back of the eye towards the neck. The throat is

white and the breast is pale with distinct brown barring along the sides and flanks. The undertail-coverts are pale. The crown, nape and back are brown which extends down onto the rump and uppertail-coverts. The tail is brown. There are distinct subterminal bands to the retained juvenile coverts, usually only on the greater coverts, and the tertials (Lewington *et al.* 1992).

The calls of the Brown Shrike are a harsh chattering “*che-che-che-che*” or when alarmed gives a “*gichigichigichi*” call (Brazil 2009).

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

The Brown Shrike is an accidental vagrant migrant species in British Columbia with an immature bird found and photographed by Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne at Skonun Point, near Masset, Haida Gwaii on October 26, 2015 (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). This represents the first record for British Columbia and a second record for Canada. The photographs are very distant and are not of high quality, but do show the correct species (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The bird was found to be on its own, but in the same general area was an adult Northern Shrike (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The Brown Shrike kept low in the cover of a nearby tree and was not easily visible out in the open (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). Both birds were not present the previous day and likely arrived on the same large storm system the night before the day of discovery which was from the west (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). Haida Gwaii is perfectly situated to turn up Siberian birds that are blown out of East Asia and across the Aleutian Islands (M. Meredith Pers. Comm.). It is likely that birds that follow the flight path past Haida Gwaii can end up anywhere along the west coast of North America, but in particular, along the coast of Northern California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). There are 2 late September records of the Brown Shrike from northern California and 2 records of wintering birds that were both found in November and stayed into the spring (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2017). The bird at Skonun Point, after making its journey across from Asia, likely ended up somewhere along the west coast of North America to spend the winter if it survived the journey. The Brown Shrike has been found in the region at Sitka, Alaska from November 26-29, 1999 (Tobish 2000). Given that the species is a long distance migrant in Asia, it is very likely to occur again in the future.

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