

Northern Shrike  
15 Jul 1990  
Ida Co., IA  
Dawn De Vore  
IBL 60:101, 105, 62:22

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Record Number: 90-16  
Classification: NA

## DOCUMENTATION

Dawn L. De Vore

## REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:101,105  
Records Committee: IBL 62:22

VOTE: 1 A-D, 6 NA

NA: a very well described shrike. However, 1) no mention of bill being deeply hook or extra large, 2) no mention of head as being larger, 3) Loggerheads have varying amounts of black on face, 4) a highly doubtful time! Earliest date Minnesota October 6,8,9; latest spring Apr. 24, 25, 30. 5) a possible non-migrant?

NA: A very thoughtful and diligent description. However, lack of previous experience with either shrike species seems to open up the reasonable possibility that observer was misled by the information contained in the field guide listed as a reference. I've made the same mistake many times. This species is nearly impossible at this time of year and would almost need to be photographed to be accepted. Thanks for a good try, however.

NA: This species breeds in Alaska and the far northern areas of Canada. It is unusual in Iowa even in the winter, and it is highly unlikely an individual would be found in Iowa in summer unless it was very sick or crippled. A young Loggerhead Shrike has barring on the breast, and the bill may appear lighter at the base like a Northern's (Audubon Master Guide, Vol 3). The photograph of a juvenile Loggerhead in the Master Guide shows, in fact, a pale gray bird with an incomplete mask, and some white or light area above the eye. Considering that this would be much more likely given the date and habitat, I believe this to be a juvenile Loggerhead Shrike.

A-D: A head scratcher. If correctly identified, this bird is wildly out of range. I wonder why the observer even considered Northern - I would have thought Loggerhead and kept on driving. However, the detailed description supports Northern. Hooked bill (subjective), location of mask, white rump (supportive but not diagnostic), and especially barring of white breast support ID. I could not find any literature on molt timing and sequence of Loggerhead, which could, I suppose, explain breast barring. Other marks suggest this is a full adult bird. This is an exemplary documentation. Faced with the difficult decision as to whether the bird or the observer erred, I'll go with the bird.

NA: This observer certainly has written an excellent and detailed documentation. However, this bird if accepted would be extremely out of place at this date (in fact Iowa Bird indicates it would be at exactly the most unlikely time to see this bird in Iowa, 2 1/2 months on either side of the latest date 4/1 and the earliest date 10/2). The juvenile Loggerhead Shrike pictured on



page 91 of Volume 3 of the Master Guide to Birding is similar to the bird described/ note no black above eye and barred underparts. I also looked at the pictures referenced by the observer in the Birds of N. America and can easily see why one would be forced to pick the N. Shrike over the juvenile Loggerhead given the information available here.

NA: A very good study and description of the bird seen in NW Iowa in mid July. Loggerhead Shrike does have a hooked bill just not as distinct a hook as Northern. The paintings in Robbins, et al. for shrikes are less than ideal and misleading. The paintings in the National Geographic Society field guide are much more realistic. A young Loggerhead is somewhat lighter in color than the adult with light barring on the breast and on the sides. The loreal area is also much lighter in color than the adult with a much reduced front mask area. The rump area varies from gray to whitish in the Loggerhead also. The bill of immature Loggerhead Shrikes are also lighter in color than the adults also. There is a picture of a Loggerhead (probably an immature) in the Birds of Canada, Godfrey, 1979 that shows the light loreal area similar to what is discussed here. I would say that this is probably a early hatch, bird of the year, immature Loggerhead Shrike.

NA: Lots of good descriptions and notes have been included. A Northern Shrike shouldn't be in Iowa in summer unless injured and couldn't migrate. A Northern's summer range is extreme N. Manitoba and the NW Territories in Canada.

The Robbins guide has the color much darker for the head and back on the Loggerhead Shrike than they usually are. The Audubon Master Guide states, "Plumage differences between shrikes are often subtle and difficult to see; best distinguished on basis of combination of several features". The bill on the lower mandible should have a pale base and not just a lighter black color. A Northern's bill should be longer with a more distinct hook than a Loggerhead Shrike.

The eye description alone of not being enclosed entirely in the black mask is suggestive of a Northern Shrike and not a Loggerhead, but we should be careful with that. The Audubon Master Guide shows a photo of a Northern Shrike with the eye all enclosed in the narrow mask.

Shrikes can be difficult to tell apart often even at close range and having no previous experience with either shrike species could be a reason to mistake a Loggerhead Shrike for a Northern Shrike. Don't be discouraged. Keep birding and observing and recording notes of birds in your area.



DOCUMENTATION FORM  
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species Northern Shrike, *Lanius excubitor*

Location Block 376 Ida County, 2.3 miles South on county pavement, South of Battle Creek, turn 1/2 mile East, turn North into field-lane, Ida County, Iowa.

Habitat Open farm land, a hay field on one side, and a corn field on the other side. The bird was along a fence row.

Date(s) 7/15/90 Time around 3:00 PM to 3:10 PM

Names and Address Dawn L. De Vore, 300 Barnes Street, Apt. #12, Ida Grove, Iowa 51445

Other observers Don Poggensee and Pam Poggensee

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under-tail, legs, feet). Also mention behavior and voice.

The birds total body size, was just slightly smaller than a Blue Jay.

Bill: hooked on the end, dark black on the top mandible, slightly lighter black on the lower mandible.

Eye: black.

Head: top of the head was a light gray color, below this and just above the eye was a white band or mark. This white band or mark started at the point where the upper mandible of the bill met the face of the bird and went along almost the entire side of where the upper mandible met the face. The only area around the edge where the bill met the face that was not white, was at the point where the upper mandible met the lower mandible, and here it was black. The white band continued towards the back of the head, going up and over the top of the eye. Once over the eye it continued straight back until it about one fourth of the way from the back of the head, at this point it angled downward following the angle or curve of the head. It continued this gentle descent, meeting up with the white on the neck area. Above the entire white band was light gray. Along the area where the lower mandible met the face was also white. This white area also continued back towards the back of the head, ending about one fourth of the way from the back of the head where it met up with the white from the band that ran above the eye. This area of white continues on down the neck and belly areas. Between the white band and white area, was a black oblong patch. This patch started at the point where the upper and lower mandibles met, it went under the eye, along the lower part, forming a very narrow line or streak of black. It then widened out going upwards slightly. It then widened out a little more filling the area between the

white band and area, forming what I call part of an oblong circle pattern, the end of the oblong circle was slightly pointed. This black patch ended just slightly more than one fourth of the way towards the back of the head. The black area had white along the top, bottom, and this white from the top and the bottom met along the side towards the back of the head, thus, surrounding the black area on three sides with white. (see drawing labeled Head on Page 4)

Neck: White towards the front, that continued until about one fourth of the way from the back of the head. At this point the color was light gray.

Back: Light gray all along the back until it reaches the upper tail coverts area. The entire upper tail coverts area was white.

Wing: the shoulder was light gray, with a band of white along the bottom edge of the shoulder. This white band was very skinny towards the breast and became a bit wider as it went towards the back. The area below the shoulder was black, with white tips on the secondaries. Also there was a white patch of feathers towards the top of the primaries. (see drawing labeled Wing on Page 4)

Tail: long and rounded at the end or like the Blue Jays tail in size and shape. The color was black with a very small bit of white trimming out the edges of the outer tail feathers.

Throat: white.

Breast: light bares on the white breast.

Belly: light bares on the white belly.

Under-tail: did not see the under tail.

Legs: dark color.

Feet: dark color.

Behavior: sat on the planter and looked at us, then it flew into a small tree and looked at us again.

Voice: It never sang or called.

While looking at the bird, there was time to compare it to the pictures of the Northern and Loggerhead Shrike, in the bird book. Everyone that saw the bird and the pictures fully agreed that it was a Northern Shrike.

#### **Similar species and how eliminated:**

Loggerhead Shrike: On the bird that was seen the top of the bill was dark black and the bottom was a lighter in color. A Loggerhead has a completely black bill. The bird that was seen was a light gray, much lighter than a Loggerhead adult. The bird was not a juv. Loggerhead because the black patch on the head is very different than that of a Loggerhead. On a Loggerhead the black area or patch is very wide and runs along both over and under the eye, it also continues back toward the back of the head meeting up with the gray on the back of the birds head. On the bird that was seen the black area or patch did not run both over and under the eye, it only ran under the eye. Also the patch did not meet up with the gray on the back of



the birds head, the black area was surrounded on three sides by white, never letting the black meet up with the gray.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain: N/A

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Sunny ski. 15 to 20 feet from the bird. (15 to 20 feet is about how far I can throw a baseball and still hit the target I am aiming at) Binoculars, Jason 7x35 optics.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

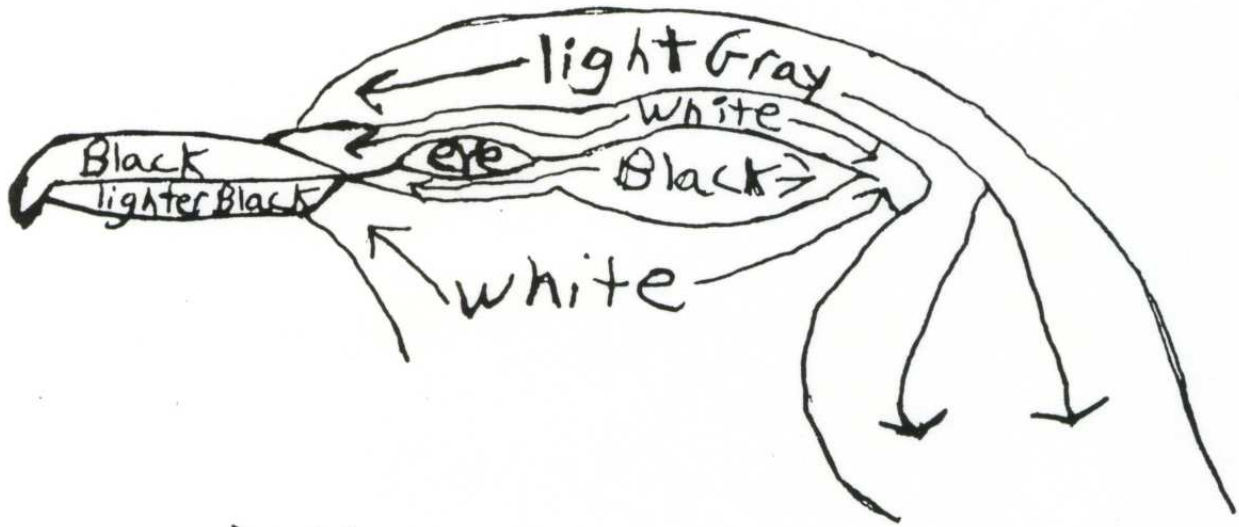
None

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Robbins, Chandler S., Bruun, Bertel, Zim, Herbert S., Illustrated by Singer, Arthur, A Guide to Field Identification Birds of North America, Golden Press, New York: Western Publishing Company, Inc. Racine, Wisconsin, 1966, pp. 242-243.

How long before field notes made? two hours How long before this form completed? This form was completed on 7/16/90.

# Head



# Wing

