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Birds of the Great Plains (Revised edition 2009) by Paul Johnsgard

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Birds of the Great Plains: Family Laniidae (Shrikes)

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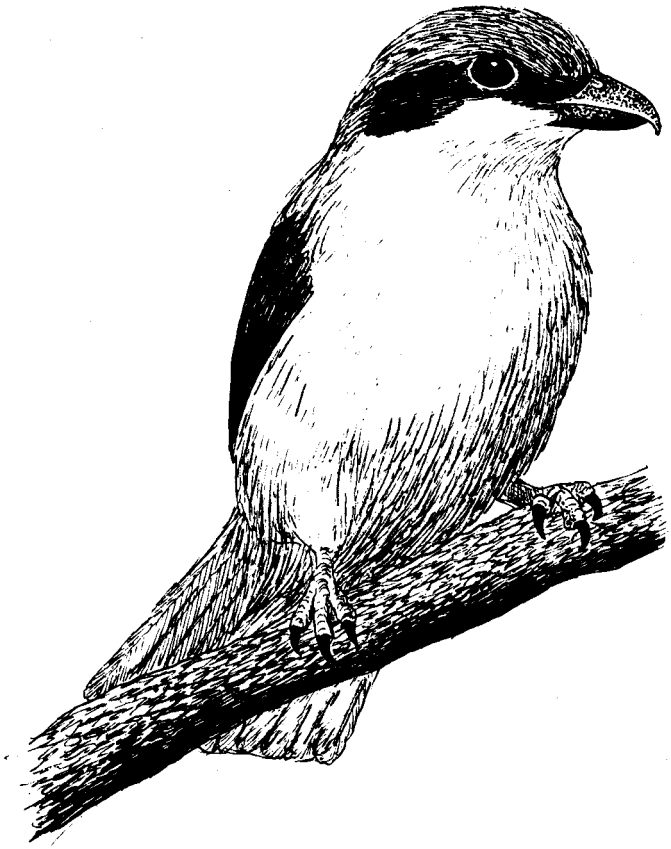
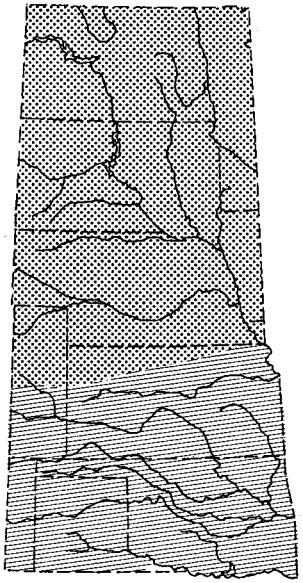
FAMILY LANIIDAE (SHRIKES)



Loggerhead Shrike

Loggerhead Shrike
Lanius ludovicianus



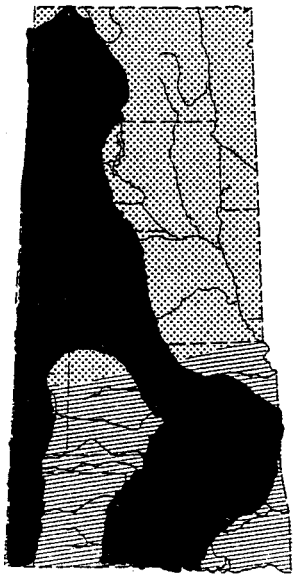
Breeding Status: Breeds pandemically throughout the region in suitable habitats.

Breeding Habitat: The species is associated with open-country habitats that include scattered or clustered shrubs or small trees, such as shelterbelts, cemeteries, farmsteads, hedgerows, and the like. It is uncommon to rare in heavily wooded areas such as the Black Hills and northern Minnesota.

Nest Location: Nests are in woody vines, shrubs, and small trees, usually 4-20 feet above the ground in dense foliage. Most nests are less than 10 feet high, in isolated trees or in small thickets. They are bulky, constructed mostly of sticks and twigs, with a soft lining of rootlets, feathers, cottony materials, and the like. Thorny trees seem to be especially favored sites, probably because they provide protection from predation.

Clutch Size and Incubation Period: From 4 to 7 eggs (9 North Dakota clutches averaged 5.4 and 32 Kansas clutches averaged 5.3). The eggs are white to grayish with gray to brown spots and blotches. The incubation period is 16 days. Reportedly double-brooded, yet recent Colorado studies suggest that renesting but not double-brooding is typical in that area.

Time of Breeding: North Dakota egg dates are from April 18 to June 19, and Kansas dates extend from April 1 to June 30, with a peak in mid-April. In Oklahoma, egg dates are from March 20 to about June 28, with nestlings seen as late as July 13.



Breeding Biology: On a study area in north-central Colorado, shrikes arrived in early April and had established territories by the first of May. Both sexes help build the nest. Nests in Colorado were separated by at least 400 meters, and nest sites of previous years were often used. The female incubates, but her mate feeds her and both sexes bring food to the young. The fledgling period is normally 17 days but may require up to 20 days. The young birds gradually learn how to wedge or impale food items in forks or on thorns or other sharp objects; the development of impaling seems to include both learned and innate components. Impaling is generally recognized as a means of short-term food storage and is thus most likely to occur in shrikes that are not hungry.

Suggested Reading: Wemmer 1969; Porter et al., 1975.