THE WILSON BULLETIN

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGY

VOL. XXXIII JUNE, 1921 NO. 2

OLD SERIES VOL. XXXIII. NEW SERIES VOL. XXVIII

MIGRANT SHRIKE

(Lanius ludovicianus migrans)

BY IRA N. GABRIELSON

On the 21st of June, 1915, while poking about in a natural hedge composed of plum, hawthorne, and other like trees, I happened to glance up just in time to see a Shrike slipping off through the branches. A little investigation soon disclosed a nest built of sticks, sections of morning glory vines, scraps of paper, and shreds of wool and lined with small roots. Looking into the nest I discovered five eggs. While this nest was too high in the air to photograph successfully I determined to try moving it. On returning July 5th I found five young ones 3 to 5 days old. This suited me exactly as the feeding instinct seems to be at its height during the first few days of the nestling period. Consequently, I cut the branch on which the nest was built and lowered it six feet. While many others have used this method successfully, this was the first nest which I was able to move without disturbing the birds. A blind was erected, but the following morning it had been torn down by cattle. It was replaced and at 5:00 p. m. was entered just long enough to make sure that the old birds were still caring for the young. On July 8 I entered the blind at 11:00 a. m. and remained until 4:45 p. m. watching these birds and taking photographs.

During the seven hours on July 6 and 8 while the nest was under observation the nestlings were fed 39 times or at the rate of 5½ times per hour. Large grasshoppers, crickets, caterpillars, larvæ of various kinds of beetles, and spiders made up the recognizable food materials. The

MIGRANT SHRIKE AT NEST

parents foraged largely from a telephone wire just above the nest. From this lookout they could watch not only the nest but also commanded a view of a considerable area of grassy hillside. Here they watched for the leathery grasshoppers which frequent the roadsides and when one flew the shrikes were after it instantly. I have frequently heard people comment on the supposed unerring accuracy with which insectivorous birds capture their prey, but here at least was one instance where such was not the case. Fortunately my blind was so located that I could see both pursuer and pursued and on this date the shrikes missed fully 50 per cent of the grasshoppers they attempted to catch. From personal experience I know how disconcerting it is to have a gaudy red or yellow winged grasshopper flying immediately before one and suddenly fold its wings and disappear. Apparently it affected the shrikes in the same manner as they flew aimlessly for a moment and then returned to their perch. From my vantage point, of course, it was easy to see the hopper drop beside a clod, the colors blending perfectly. The shrike, however, being in close pursuit saw a very conspicuous insect suddenly drop from its plane of vision and, as the grasshopper was motionless on the ground before the shrike could turn, it had everything in its favor. The fact that one shrike caught three out of six seemed to me to be striking proof of keenness of vision and agility on the wing.

Once an English Sparrow came to the nest and peeped in. Immediately one of the shrikes was after it. They passed from sight around the blind but for several seconds I could hear the rustle of the shrike's wings and the cries of the sparrow. On similar occasions at nests of other species I have seen the sparrows flee from the irate parents but never with any such panic stricken fear as in this case. There was no doubt that the sparrow had recognized the deadly nature of the bird whose home he had so rashly inspected.

On ordinary occasions the parents were very quiet about the nest although twice one of the birds, presumably the female from the actions, uttered a loud harsh scream

just before feeding. Both birds utilized the top of the blind as a perch at times and both had a sterotyped path of approach to the nest through the branches of the plum tree. Sanitary measures were of the usual kind, the excreta being carried some distance away and dropped while the parents were yet flying.

These birds were an exceedingly interesting family and I have wished to spend more time with them than was possible in the circumstances under which I was working.

NOTES ON THE HABITS OF THE BREEDING WATER BIRDS OF CHATHAM COUNTY, GEORGIA

BY W. J. ERICHSEN, SAVANNAH, GA.

[CONTINUED FROM LAST ISSUE]

Hydranassa tricolor ruficollis — LOUISIANA HERON.

Florida caerulea — LITTLE BLUE HERON.

As all of the notes which I have on the nesting of these herons are based on observations made in a fresh water pond on Ossabaw island, it seems not out of place to consider them under one heading, as their nesting habits, as I noted them, are essentially similar. During a visit to Ossabaw island in May, 1915, I estimated the number of pairs of Louisiana and Little Blue Herons nesting there to be between two and three hundred, fully two-thirds of them being the former species. Most of the nests were built in willows, but I noted a few which were placed on the tops of patches of broken down saw grass wherever they were of a sufficiently dense growth to support the weight, and I saw a dozen or more that were built upon the foundations of old nests. Although many nests contained young, the majority of them held from three to four eggs. The nestlings were in various stages of development; some just hatched, while others were nearly old enough to leave the nest. Occasionally one would fall into the water, and if it had attained a sufficient age to have gained enough