

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* from Alibaug, Maharashtra: A first record for India

Parag S. Nandgaonkar

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Parag S. Nandgaonkar, Lab Analyst, HPCL Refinery, Mumbai 400074, Maharashtra, India. Email: parag_nandgaonkar@yahoo.com



186. Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* breeds from the south-western Palearctic to south-western Asia, and winters in Africa. In South Asia, it is considered a passage migrant through south-western Afghanistan and southern Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

While travelling on a motorcycle between Mumbai and Alibaug, on 7 September 2013, at 1100 hrs, I came across this shrike beside the road (18°38'N, 72°52'E) about 90 km from Mumbai and closer Alibaug. Initially, I mistook it to be a juvenile or a sub-species of some of the more likely shrikes that occur in this region, which I hoped to resolve once back from field. I approached the bird patiently and soon found that it was tame if I was cautious, allowing me within 2.5–3.0 m of itself, while it perched on a bush. However, due to repeated interruptions from passersby, it was repeatedly disturbed, and I could not manage a photograph to my liking [186–188]. However, the record shots



187. Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*.



188. Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*.

Photos: P. S. Nandgaonkar

obtained were circulated amongst the India Nature Watch (INW) online photographic forum (www.indianaturewatch.net) where birdwatchers readily identified it as a Woodchat Shrike.

The bird was greyish-brown above and pure white below, and had a chestnut hind crown and nape. It had the trademark broad black eye-stripe of a shrike; broad white bars on dark wings, white rump, and dark tail. The photographed bird is a female of the eastern race *niloticus*. It is in almost complete adult plumage; except that the forecrown and forehead have remnants of juvenile / first winter.

Grimmett *et al.* (2011) treat it as a vagrant to Pakistan, while Kazmierczak (2000) indicates it as provisional with no reliable records with a doubtful mark around Baluchistan. The Baluchistan record is historically based on Sarudny (1911), who "lists it as a breeding bird of Persian Baluchistan," (Paludan 1959). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mention a sub-adult collected on 4 May from Seistan in south-western Afghanistan; however Paludan (1959) notes that a specimen of the race *L. s. niloticus* was collected from the "Estuary of Farah Rud, Seistan," on "4.iii.49." A single bird was seen and photographed on 28 June 1998 near Karachi, Pakistan (Sutton 2002; Roberts 2002) and is probably the bird mentioned in Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), and Grimmett *et al.* (2011). This seems to be a truly extraordinary instance of vagrancy, as the species barely reaches Iran and Baluchistan in Pakistan; a really rare bird in Asia. There are no records of this species from India and hence this record is of significance.

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