

Correspondence

A Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* from Sri Lanka

On 08 June 2024, AA observed and photographed a pale grey-coloured shrike *Lanius* sp. at Kumana National Park (6.529°N, 81.709°E; 4m asl) in southern Sri Lanka [188–189]. The individual was initially suspected to be a possible Great Grey Shrike *L. excubitor*. However, the photos were sent to MK, who identified that the bird was, in fact, a Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor*, a species new to Sri Lanka. The bird had a prominent black mask extending over the forehead and grey extending uniformly from the crown up to the upper tail coverts. It showed a black tail with white restricted to the outer most feathers and black wings with a prominent white patch at the primary bases. The throat was white, except the part closest to the bill base which was stained pale brown (possibly as a result of feeding or other external factors), and the underparts were pale pinkish brown. The bill was black, feet dark greyish black, and iris dark brown. The broad black mask extending over the forehead, the compact structure with a relatively shorter tail, and the pinkish-brown stained underparts were the features that identified the bird as Lesser Grey Shrike and distinguished it from Great Grey Shrike. The plumage features also suggested the individual to be an adult and presumably a male (Lefrank & Woodcock 2023).

The bird was first observed at 0646 h, on a short *Salvadora persica* bush beside a dirt road, inside the park. It usually perched about one meter above the ground and frequently moved between several small bushes in the area. It was observed for c.90 min and would regularly swoop down to the ground to catch prey, mostly small invertebrates. That evening, the bird was seen briefly, but was found at the same location the next morning, on 09 June 2024. It was observed again actively foraging for an hour and showing the same feeding behaviour. It was not seen thereafter.

Lesser Grey Shrike is a long-distance migratory species breeding from western Europe to Mongolia and western China, and the entire population spends their non-breeding period in southern Africa (Yosef & ISWG 2020; Lefrank & Woodcock 2023). In South Asia, it has been scarcely recorded from Ladakh, northern India and Balochistan, Pakistan (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Interestingly, another record of a Lesser Grey Shrike was reported from Kole, Enamavu, Thrissur District, Kerala, India on 04 June 2024, a few days before our sighting in Sri Lanka (Kerala Rarities (Group Account) 2024; Pmk 2024). Considering the date of observation, it is possible that this could be an individual that spent the last months in southern Sri Lanka and was on its northward migration. There is also a possibility that both birds may have been on their northward migration from southern Africa and were deflected east to southern Sri Lanka and southwestern India, possibly due to the prevailing wind conditions in the north-western Indian Ocean owing to the tropical cyclonic storm Cyclone Remal which formed in late May 2024 (Anonymous 2024).

Five species of shrikes *Lanius* spp. have been reported in Sri Lanka namely, Long-tailed Shrike *L. schach*, Brown Shrike *L. cristatus*, Bay-backed Shrike *L. vittatus*, Great Grey Shrike and Red-backed Shrike *L. collurio*. Of these, the first is a breeding resident in the northern dry zone of Sri Lanka, and the rest are



188. Lesser Grey Shrike at Kumana National Park, Sri Lanka.



189. Lesser Grey Shrike at Kumana National Park, Sri Lanka.

Both: Ashok Amaraseena

migrants, with the last three being vagrants (Warakagoda et al. 2012; Darshana 2020). Lesser Grey Shrike is the sixth *Lanius* spp. addition for Sri Lanka.

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– Ashok Amarasena & Moditha Kodikara Arachchi

Ashok Amarasena, 392A, Lake road, Awerihena, Hokandara, Sri Lanka.

Email: ashokamarasena@yahoo.com [AA]

Moditha Kodikara Arachchi, Bird Identification and Research Deck (BIRD), No.3, Third Lane, Attidiya, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka. Email: meetmoditha@gmail.com [MK] [Corresponding author]

Status of the Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* in Arunachal Pradesh

On 26 April 2019, I was birding with a group on the Mandala-Dirang Road in West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh. It was a cloudy morning with light rain. At 0940 h, I was exploring a trail a little away from my group. The trail had *Rhododendron sp.* forest on one side and a grassy pasture on the other. The grassy area had stray cattle grazing and a few Russet Sparrows *Passer cinnamomeus* drinking from a puddle. I accidentally startled a drab brown bird that was with the Russet Sparrows. It scurried away initially but settled near the cattle, after which it did not seem perturbed by my close presence. The sparse vegetation allowed me to obtain great views and photographs [190–191].

The observed bird looked very similar to an Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, which is common in this region, but on examining the details of the plumage it was identified as a Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*. The Olive-backed Pipit is closely related to the Tree Pipit, and it has a strong buffy-white supercilium, olive back, a lightly streaked mantle, and a strongly marked face, including ear coverts with a single black spot below a single white spot (Grimmett et al. 2016). On the other hand, this bird had a weakly marked face (including a weak supercilium), brown as opposed to olive tones on the back, more prominent streaks on the mantle, and only a white spot on its ear coverts. We could not use its call as an identification pointer as the bird did not vocalize, but its plumage was enough to confirm the identification. The media and observation were uploaded to eBird (Vyas 2019). This sighting was not given much attention for almost five years, until as recently as 09 April 2024, when it was further discussed with Dhyey Shah, Ashwin Viswanathan, and Kousheyo Bagchi, who also agreed that the bird is a Tree Pipit.



190. Tree Pipit from Mandala Road.



191. Tree Pipit from Mandala Road.

Tyler (2020) recognizes two subspecies of the Tree Pipit. The nominate race breeds extensively across temperate Asia and migrates to sub-Saharan Africa and India for the northern winter. Additionally, the *haringtoni* race, breeds in the northwest Himalayas, including Kashmir, and winters in India. Although specimens of the two subspecies show minor differences, they are not considered distinguishable in the field or from photographs. (Alström & Mild 2003).

The first public report of Tree Pipit from north-eastern India is in Srinivasan et al. (2010). Their published record is sourced from unpublished sightings made between 1997–2007 in Namdapha National Park by Aparajita Dutta. Whether it was one or multiple sightings is unknown because specific dates are not mentioned. Identifying characteristics, precise location, and elevation are not mentioned either. The second public record is from 15 April 2019 on an unnamed road near Mandala, in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh (Ramachandran 2019). The bird was identified in the field by its relatively unmarked face and lack of olive on the back. The '*yunnanensis*' subspecies of Olive-backed Pipit was eliminated by the lack of white and black spots on the ear coverts. No media was submitted. The sighting reported in this note occurred just 11 days after the above sighting, and the locations are merely 12 km apart. We found two additional public records from north-eastern India, both from the Assam plains. An individual was reported in an eBird checklist from the Central Range of Kaziranga National Park on 18 December 2004 (Steiner 2004). The record was substantiated by a description of field marks, "Brownish back (no olive tones) with bold dark markings, unmarked rump, tertials with pale fringes, finer flank streaks compared to breast streaks, face markings less contrasty." A second observation is claimed from a bird diversity survey of Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (Joshi et al. 2014). No date and identification details were provided, so we consider this record doubtful. Sharma et al. (2014) reported Tree Pipits from Lohit valley. However, the accompanying photo does not show any characteristics of a Tree Pipit like the shorter tail and well-streaked flanks. Hence, the same is treated here as doubtful.

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