

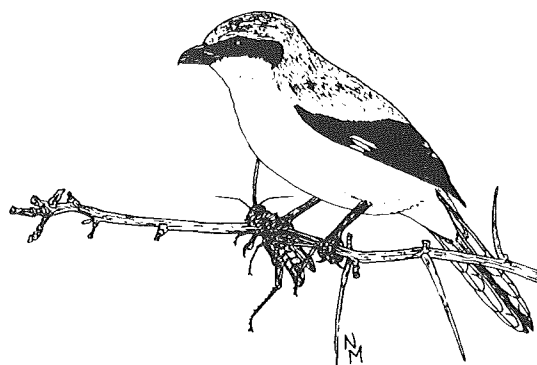
Loggerhead Shrike

Lanius ludovicianus

The Loggerhead Shrike's notched, hooked bill and barbarous habits belie its status as a songbird. Much maligned as a "butcher bird" for its habit of caching prey on thorns or barbed wire fences, the Loggerhead Shrike helps fill an ecological niche left vacant by larger raptorial species. Although small birds may form a portion of the shrike's diet, particularly in winter, insects and mice are its primary prey.

Certainly one of the rarest breeding birds in Vermont, the Loggerhead is proposed for Endangered Species status in the state. As a result of growing concern for the species throughout the Northeast, it is being considered for Threatened or Endangered species status by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Milburn 1981). The Loggerhead Shrike has always been a rare breeder in Vermont. Milburn (1981) recorded only 23 verified nests and 25 potential nesting records in the state since 1870. The majority of these records come from Addison (11), Rutland (10), Chittenden (9), and Grand Isle (5) counties, with lesser numbers in Franklin, Orange, Orleans, Lamoille, and Windsor counties. Nesting activity appears to have peaked in the late 1800s, 1950s, and 1970s (Milburn 1981; RVB 1973-83).

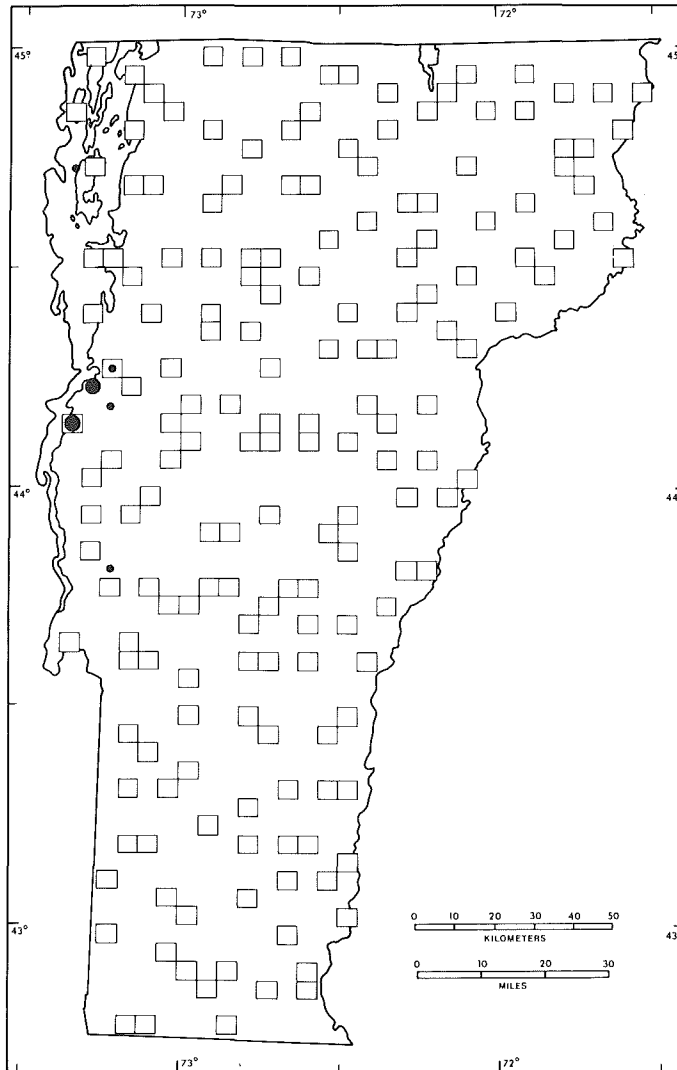
During the Atlas Project, the Loggerhead Shrike was recorded as breeding only in the Champlain Lowlands. Confirmation was obtained twice: at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, when adults were observed feeding young on June 21, 1977 (the family group was observed together throughout July [ASR, A. Pistorius]); and in hayfields bordered by hedgerows near South Slang in Ferrisburg, where two adults and three young were observed on August 7, 1978 (ASR, J. and M. Dye). Three possible breeding reports were also obtained in 1977 and 1978: in Ferrisburg one adult seen on June 13, 1977, and another on June 22, 1978 (ASR, J. and M. Dye); an adult was seen on South Hero July 6, 1978 (ASR, A. L. Gosnell). Since 1978 there has been no evi-



dence of nesting in Vermont; single nesting season sightings have been recorded for 1979, 1980, and 1982, but no nesting season reports at all were made in 1981 or 1983, even though a special three-day survey of former nesting sites was carried out in 1983 (RVB 1978-83).

The Loggerhead is a rare migrant; indeed the species reaches the northeastern limit of its distribution in the Northeast. The current breeding populations in the Northeast appear to occupy an area encompassing the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River valley. In the Northeast, Loggerhead Shrikes begin to reappear from their wintering areas in the southern U.S. in late March; they depart by the end of October. Their presence in spring and fall overlaps somewhat that of the Northern Shrike, *Lanius excubitor*, a species that frequently winters at Vermont's latitude and is sometimes misidentified as the Loggerhead. In Vermont, Loggerheads usually return in the first week in April, although March dates exist; the latest fall date reported is "early September" (RVB, 1973-83).

Loggerhead Shrikes prefer to nest in dense, thorny shrubs in relatively open habitats. Hedgerows bordering grasslands and abandoned orchards are typical nesting areas. The bulky twig nest, which may take more than a week to construct (Graber et al. 1973), may be located 1.2-6.1 m (4-20 ft) above the ground, frequently in a hawthorn or apple tree (Bull 1974). Shrikes commence nesting as early as the latter half of April in New York, where second broods have been recorded (Bull 1975). Six egg dates for Vermont range from May 4 through



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 2 (1%)

Possible breeding: 1 (50% of total)

Probable breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 1 (50% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

| | no. of priority blocks | % of region's priority blocks | % of species' total priority blocks |
|---------------------|------------------------------|--|---|
| Champlain Lowlands | 2 | 6 | 100 |
| Green Mountains | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| North Central | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Northeast Highlands | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| East Central | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Taconic Mountains | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Eastern Foothills | 0 | 0 | 0 |

May 29. Clutches are relatively large, averaging 5 to 6 dull white eggs. Incubation may last 10 to 12 days when both sexes share the chore (Bent 1950), but may otherwise require as many as 17 days (Graber et al. 1973). Incubation is apparently initiated before completion of the clutch (D. P. Kibbe, pers. observ.), as is the case with many raptorial species. The young may fledge at 3 weeks of age but remain dependent upon the parents for an additional 2 weeks (Terres 1980). Dependent fledglings have been noted in Vermont from June 21 through August 7.

Shrikes are highly territorial: both members of the pair defend the nesting territory (Miller 1931; Bent 1950). Because shrikes

carry food year-round to caches, locating nests or young is the most reliable method of obtaining breeding confirmation. The species is thought to be declining throughout the Northeast (Milburn 1981); every effort should be made to protect and preserve current nesting locations.

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