Genus COLLURIO, Vigors.

Gen. Char. Beak and feet as in the genus Lanius. Wings somewhat rounded, short; the first quill-feather shortest; the second a little shorter than the following ones; the third, fourth and fifth, the longest and nearly equal. Tail elongated, graduated.—Type of the genus Lanius Excubitor, Linn.

GREAT SHRIKE.

Lanius Excubitor, Linn.

Collurio Excubitor, Vigors.

La Pie-grieche grise.

The present species forms the type of the genus Collurio as characterized by Mr. Vigors; and the reasons which induced that gentleman to separate certain birds from the genus Lanius—of which to form the genus Collurio,—were a short time ago explained by him to the Committee of Science and Correspondence of the Zoological Society, in the First Part of whose "Proceedings," page 42, the distinguishing characteristics of these two genera are clearly detailed. The principal feature which constitutes the ground of separation consists in the somewhat rounded form of wing, which in the true Lanii is more pointed,—and in the lengthened and graduated tail; to this may be added their general superiority of size:—the Grey Shrikes in this point manifest an ascendancy over the well-known Red-backed Shrike, the more rare Wood-chat, and their allied congeners.

The Great Shrike is one of the migratory birds of Great Britain, appearing however by no means regularly, so as to lead us to expect its annual return, but must be considered an uncertain straggler, being in some seasons very scarce, and in others more abundant, and that only during the months of autumn and winter, so as to make it rather doubtful whether it ever breeds in our island, although we are aware that such is said to be the case. It is extensively spread over Continental Europe, in many parts of which it remains stationary throughout the year; but in others it performs regular periodical migrations, departing and returning with the season.

The *C. Excubitor* is a bold and courageous bird, attacking others much larger than itself, and destroying mice, frogs, and small birds for its food, of which however we believe the hard-winged insects constitute a principal portion. In killing its prey, its chief instrument is its bill, which is thick and strong, and with which it penetrates the cranium of any small animal within its power. It never strikes with its claws in the manner of the Hawks, but uses them merely to assist in grasping and thus securing its victim; for though the legs and toes are slender and apparently weak, they are well armed with claws and have the power of tight compression. The most singular fact, however, respecting its mode of feeding or securing its prey, is its well-authenticated habit of fixing it on a thorn or sharp-pointed stick, which it selects for that purpose, and then proceeding to tear it to pieces, at the same time satisfying its appetite. Of a New Holland bird, (the *Vanga Destructor*,) the same singular habit is recorded.

The specific name of *Excubitor*, or Sentinel, was given by Linneus as one highly appropriate, from the circumstance of this bird being used on the Continent by falconers and persons engaged in procuring falcons for the purpose of hawking, especially the Peregrine during the period of its migrations. The Shrike acts as a sort of monitor, giving warning to the man in attendance of the approach of the sharp-eyed bird of prey, the appearance of which, even at a great distance, immediately elicits its querulous chattering cry. A net trap, artfully contrived, is placed for the capture of the falcon, and a live pigeon secured by a string, over which the man has perfect controul, allures the falcon to the fatal engine. In the mean time the Shrike, having warned the man of the near approach of the expected visitant, retires, as the danger increases, to a hole provided for its safety; there it continues chattering loudly, while the falcon pounces upon the fated pigeon, and is cunningly enticed by the gradual withdrawing of his victim, which he will not quit, within the circle of the net: the check-string once pulled, the capture is achieved. For its peculiar aid in this service, the Shrike is unrivalled, and when hawking was in vogue its merits were duly appreciated.

The favourite resorts of the Great Shrike are high hedges, coppices, and thick trees, among which it breeds, building a nest composed of grasses, moss, and vegetable fibres, and laying from five to seven white eggs marked with ash-grey and brownish blotches. The only difference to be observed in the plumage of the sexes, is that the breast of the female is transversely barred with faint lines of ash colour.

In the adult male the head, neck and back, are of a fine light ash; a band of black passes below the eye, and covers the ear-feathers; wings black, with a white spot in the centre, formed by the white bases of the quill-feathers; the outer tail-feathers white; the remainder black, terminating with white, which becomes more contracted as they approach the two middle feathers,—these are entirely black; beak and feet black. Length nine inches.

We have figured an adult male.