LANIUS EXCUBITOR, *Linn.*

Great Grey Shrike.

Lanius excubitor, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 27.
—— *cinereus*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 19.
—— *major*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 232.

Those of my readers who have travelled over the long straight roads of Germany and France, before the days of the "Eisenbahn" and "chemin de fer," must have frequently seen a Magpie-looking bird perched on an exposed branch of a mountain-ash, an apple-, or a walnut-tree—or, should their eyes have scanned the open flat fields, have observed such a bird sitting upright on a twig or small bush, and have remarked that, as they approached, it flew off to the next tree, and as they proceeded along the interminable straight road it flitted before them for perhaps a mile, and then, taking to the open, abruptly turned back again to the point whence it started. This was the Great Grey Shrike, a solitary bird, which is neither common nor scarce, and which, if not intruded upon, remains in the same district, and almost confines itself to the same branch for days together. Hence it sallies forth to capture any passing insect, mouse, or shrew, or to make a foray among the branches of the neighbouring trees in pursuit of nestling Tits or any other small birds it can master. While perched, the solitary Butcherbird jerks its tail from side to side, sometimes uttering its own harsh cry, at others obscurely imitating the notes of other birds.

Along the thorny-hedge-bordered roads of this country, as along the lengthened lines of apple-trees seen on the continent, the bird exhibits the same habits and actions, which, while they are common to it and the other Shrikes, are both peculiar and different from those of all other small birds. Frequently does the Great Grey Shrike take up its abode in the low trees of a copse, a cluster of thorns, an open field, or in the midst of a pleasure-ground, and there remain, if unmolested, until nature prompts it to seek countries better suited for breeding in. The Duke of Argyll informs me that one took up a conspicuous position in the pleasure-grounds of his seat at Inverary, and, as usual, became the terror of all the small birds therein.

I do not venture to affirm that this bird never breeds in the British Islands; but I believe that many of the nests brought to the metropolis as those of this species are really not so; for few indeed are the authentic instances of its passing the summer and breeding with us; and it must therefore, in my opinion, be regarded as an occasional visitor rather than as a stationary species; still there is not a district in the three kingdoms that has not at one time or another been favoured with its presence. Formerly it was considered to be identical with the *Lanius borealis* of America; but this is not, I believe, correct; and naturalists now consider the area of its range to be limited to the north and north-western portions of Europe, Morocco, and Algeria. In India it is certainly not found, its place being there supplied by the *Lanius lahtoro*. Considerable difference occurs in the colouring of Norwegian, French, and Swiss examples; the latter are much lighter in the general tone of colour, and have the white patch on the scapularies much more distinct than the others. On the other hand, Lapland specimens, of which I have three from Quickiock now before me, are particularly dark in their colouring. No one, however, has ventured to regard them as two species; and I shall content myself with having pointed out their differences. I am not aware that the distinctive markings of the sexes have been noticed by any previous writer; if they have not, the following particulars cannot fail to be of interest. Mainly the two birds are alike in plumage; but the female may be at all times distinguished by her being rather larger than the male, by her having a few or many crescentic marks of grey, varying in intensity, on the chest and the upper portion of the flank-feathers, by having a single white speculum at the base of the primaries, and by the three outer tail-feathers on each side being tipped with white, the white on the outermost extending to the base of its external web; while the male has two white spots on the wing, one at the base of the primaries and another at the base of the secondaries, forming a double speculum, and moreover has the two outer tail-feathers on each side wholly white, with the exception of a narrow line of black down the basal portion of the shaft.

"This species," says Macgillivray, "preys upon insects of various kinds, frogs, lizards, small birds and quadrupeds, which, after killing them by repeated blows of its bill, generally inflicted upon the head, it affixes to a thorn, or jams into the fork of a branch, that it may be enabled to tear them up into small morsels. Sometimes, however, it stands upon its prey, like a Hawk, keeping it down with its feet while it breaks it up, and not bestowing much care in clearing it of the hair or feathers, which, with the undigested parts of insects, it afterwards ejects in pellets. What remains after it is satisfied it hangs up; and this habit, together with its slaughtering-propensity, has obtained for it the not inap-