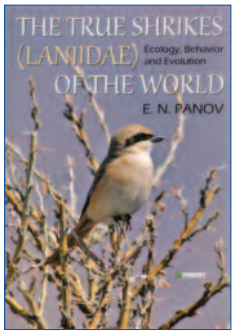
Reviews



The True Shrikes (Laniidae) of the World: ecology, behavior and evolution

By E. N. Panov
Pensoft, 2011
Hbk, 910pp; many colour photographs and line-drawings
ISBN 978-954-642-576-8 Subbuteo code M21133
£125.00 ***BB*** **Bookshop price £112.50**

Evigeniy Panov is one of the great field ornithologists, and one of relatively few to have had a lifetime of access to the birds of Siberia and the republics of the former Soviet central Asia. A previous book of his, *The Wheatears of the Palearctic* (Pensoft, 2005), drew on first-hand study of plumage, vocalisations, behaviour and hybridisation, combined with an extensive literature review, to make conclusions about the relationships of the wheatears *Oenanthe* and to synthesise our knowledge of their ecology. This current book, his long-awaited and massive work on the shrikes of the world, follows a similar plan. Systematics and nomenclature figure heavily throughout the book. Although this is not primarily an identification guide, the reviews of plumage patterns, vocalisations and some important biometrics will ensure that it becomes an essential reference work for those who are interested in identification of these taxa in the hand or in the field.

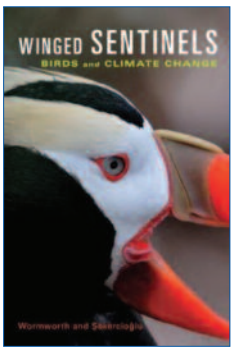
The book, with 26 chapters and two appendices, is broadly divided into eight parts, starting with a general view of shrike biology and ending with a discussion and proposed phylogeny for the genus *Lanius*. In between, the shrikes are organised in species groups correlating with some of their major radiations. Thus the 'large' grey shrikes are treated together, as are the 'Mediterranean' shrikes (Masked *L. nubicus*, Woodchat *L. senator* and Lesser Grey Shrikes *L. minor*), the Red-backed/red-tailed (Isabelline) Shrikes *L. collurio/isabellinus*, the east Asian species (including Brown Shrike *L. cristatus*) and the central/southeast Asian species. The convergent African Laniids of the genera *Eurocephalus*, *Corvinella* and *Urolestes* are included in a section about African *Lanius*. For all the species, the author's studies and other literature are summarised to cover nomenclature, range, subspecies, status, migration and phenology, breeding and nest-site biology, diet, moult, and any other biological notes that the author considers interesting, depending on the taxa involved. For example, there is a chapter dedicated to hybridisation within the Red-backed/Isabelline complex, illustrated with photographs of hybrid phenotypes, which contains much information not easily accessible to western ornithologists. In general, the amount of information is exhaustive, bordering on overwhelming. The descriptions of breeding behaviour are alive with first-hand information. In contrast, the newly split Giant Shrike (or Tibetan Grey Shrike) *L. giganteus*, formerly treated as a race of Chinese Grey Shrike *L. sphenocercus*, gets a chapter less than two and a half pages long, such is the paucity of literature, and much of that is a range map.

Two appendices discuss specific issues relevant to shrike taxonomy. The first, by Tom Cade, discusses the pros and cons of different morphological and genetic methods of subspecific delineation in the Loggerhead Shrike *L. ludovicianus*. It concludes that a more rigorous quantification of plumage colours and patterns is required, and much greater genetic sampling of populations from across the range of the species. The second, by Anna Bannikova, is a critical review of genetic studies of the phylogeny of shrikes – it warns against widespread changes in taxonomy based only on mitochondrial DNA and argues against changes to prevailing taxonomy without a firm basis of evidence. This echoes arguments made by Panov in the main text – where there is a recurrent theme of potential conflict between genetic- and morphological-based phylogenies. Panov, for example, prefers to retain the current north/south split of large grey shrikes (Great Grey *L. excubitor* and Southern Grey Shrike *L. meridionalis*), in contrast to the arrangements proposed by recent genetic studies, which recommend this group possibly be split into six or more species (Olsson *et al.* 2010, *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 55: 347–357). Also of interest is that the author splits

Turkestan Shrike as *L. phoenicuroides* (previously included as a subspecies within Isabelline Shrike *L. isabellinus*), and discusses the greyer-backed form '*karelini*' as an entity still in limbo, without any formal subspecific delineation. His treatment of the remaining 'Isabelline' shrikes follows that of Stegmann from 1930, retaining the name *L. isabellinus speculigerus* for Daurian Shrike. The arrangement proposed in 2000 by Pearson (*Bull. BOC* 120: 22–27), under which Daurian Shrike became *L. i. isabellinus*, is discounted. This is in spite of the fact that Panov has already shown that the type specimen of *speculigerus* shows some features indicative of a hybrid origin involving Red-backed Shrike, which would suggest that the name is invalid. The author's approach, to respond to the confused taxonomic situation by sitting tight and doing nothing to exacerbate the 'capricious' (his word) taxonomic history of Isabelline Shrikes, may strike a chord with many people who maintain checklists.

Overall, the book represents a phenomenal body of work and an essential resource for anyone with an interest in any aspect of shrike biology. It is not cheap, and it is not an easy read, but it will repay any number of hours of study afforded to it.

Martin Collinson



Winged Sentinels: birds and climate change

By Janice Wormworth and Çağan Şekercioğlu
Cambridge University Press, 2011
Pbk, 262pp; many colour photographs
ISBN 978-0-521-12682-3 Subbuteo code M21131
£24.99 ***BB*** **Bookshop price £22.49**

The subject of climate change is rarely out of the news and its effects are obvious to anyone with an interest in weather, landscape or natural history. Many biologists believe that, if change continues at its current rate, it is likely to present the major conservation problems of the coming decades and that many plant and animal species will become extinct. Not surprisingly, the scientific literature on the effects of climate change on plants and animals has mushroomed over the last 20 years or so, but this book is an attempt to summarise this literature as it relates to birds. The first author is a freelance science writer, while the second is an academic and conservationist, working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at the University of Utah.

As expected, the book covers all the major known effects of climate change on bird populations, from shifts in the timing of seasonal events, such as migration and breeding, to changes in population levels and distribution patterns, discussing, wherever known, the mechanisms involved. In the northern hemisphere, the breeding ranges of many bird species are spreading northwards or upwards, while at the same time retracting from the southern and lower limits of their recent ranges. The book is truly international in its approach, with examples provided from every continent, and a good coverage of the European literature. One chapter deals specifically with the oceans, the changes in sea temperatures, acidification and water-current systems that underlie some of the major reproductive failures and population declines witnessed in recent years among some British seabirds. But it is not just 'our' seabirds that are being affected, as similar events are occurring at various localities around the world. Although many bird species are likely to 'benefit' from climate changes, developing larger populations that extend over wider areas, others are expected to decline in numbers and distributions. It is the potential problem-species that the authors concentrate on throughout. The last chapter describes how conservation thinking and actions are being modified and developed to take account of the population and range changes that are already underway, but are likely to gather pace in the coming years. According to the literature that the authors quote, extinctions are inevitable.

Some of the research in this field is based on what has happened already, and any argument about it is likely to centre on the importance of climate as opposed to other human impacts that could have caused the changes observed. But other research, just as necessary, is concerned with the prediction of further changes likely to occur in the coming years. However well founded, this is essentially speculative. This is not a criticism, but a