

FIELD NOTES

NOTES ON THE MIGRANT SHRIKE

During the spring months I was very much interested in the queer flight maneuvers of a migrant Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus migrans*), which spent a large part of every day about a certain field on which I was usually working.

This Shrike (perhaps I should say Shrikes, for this species is common here) had a very regular habit of flying up into the air about twenty feet and, with rapidly fluttering wings, hanging there in one spot for some time. The bird would beat its wings very rapidly for twenty seconds or longer, but it always remained at exactly the same place, its wings being used only to maintain its position in the air. It made me think of a mechanical bird suspended from the sky by a cord. After this performance, the purpose of which was not clear to me, the Shrike flew away to some post or other alighting place. It always faced the wind, if there were any at all, on the occasion of these peculiar flight antics. Day after day, all through the spring, I saw it thus fluttering aimlessly in the air. It did it dozens or hundreds of times in a day, or perhaps even in an hour, as it felt inclined. It was always a very common practice.

A pair of these birds had a nest of young in a grapevine-covered crab apple tree, at the edge of the field. One day, while plowing corn here, I saw one of the Shrikes capture a mouse behind me in a row I had just plowed. The Shrike was shaking the mouse (I thought it was a young one from its rather small size) very vigorously, and maybe beating it upon the ground. It handled it in much the same way that a domestic chicken kills a mouse. When the mouse was lifeless, or nearly so, the Shrike lost no time in flying toward the nest, the mouse clutched firmly in its bill.

Being a large gray bird, the migrant Shrike is in a class by itself, and since it is a common summer resident here, it is particularly noticeable along the roadsides and in the fields. Though the Shrike may wear the black mark of the bandit, I am disposed to regard him as a peaceful as well as useful neighbor.

The migrant Shrike's efforts in the musical line have always interested me. Sometimes the notes are so rasping and insect-like that it is hard to imagine their coming from a bird. Often the Shrike *news* somewhat like the Catbird. I have also heard it repeat what sounded to me like "*Free dirt, free dirt,*" over and over for a long time, evidently never stopping for breath.

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Winthrop, Iowa, July 5, 1923.

A WORD FOR THE ENGLISH SPARROW

Instead of driving away sparrows I try to attract them about my yard, as their presence reassures the hordes of smaller migratory birds which stream overhead here twice a year.

From behind the screens of my porches I can make prolonged ob-