

Predation of a Bluethroat by an Isabelline Shrike

Village Sajrana (30.3390 N & 74.1207 E) about 15km from Fazilka, Punjab, India, has a mini wetland formed due to water logging. A large number of migratory birds visit here every year. On 15 January 2023, a routine birding visit to Sajrana was underway since 0900 h. At about 1200 h, as it was decided to pack-up, some activity was noted in the roadside thorny bushes.

An Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* was seen on a thorny branch with a kill which was thought to be a rodent. A quick look through the camera showed that the prey was a small bird. A few shots were taken hurriedly. It was decided to make a video also, but before the camera mode could be changed, the Shrike took its kill from the thorn on which it was impaled and flew away. From examination of the photos, it turned out that the small bird was a Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*.

Shrikes are highly opportunistic feeders, preying on the most easily available victims (Harris & Franklin 2000). Specifically,



Isabelline Shrike holding the dead Bluethroat. © Swarn Singh.



Isabelline Shrike impaling the dead Bluethroat. © Swarn Singh.

for Isabelline Shrike, food consists mostly of insects, particularly beetles and grasshoppers; other invertebrates such as spiders and snails are taken too (Lefranc & Worfolk 1997).

Small vertebrates are also taken all the year round. Birds are regularly caught on migration and in the winter quarters; among the most frequent victims are wagtails *Motacilla* sp. and warblers *Phylloscopus* sp. Other vertebrates found in the diet include: lizards, amphibians and even fish. As per Harris & Franklin (2000), the food of Isabelline Shrike comprises of arthropods and small vertebrates. They also mention the predation on (bird) chicks in non-breeding grounds. King (2017) has given detailed description of the hunting technique of an Isabelline Shrike with several photographs taken while it was attempting to predate upon a Northern Wheatear.

However, from India, we found only one published instance of an Isabelline Shrike predated on a small bird. An Isabelline Shrike was photographed while preying on a Pipit (*Anthus* sp.) in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat on 29 November 2015 (Patel & Maheria 2016). Thus, the present observation of the killing of a Bluethroat is an addition to the list of birds that are part of the food of Isabelline Shrike.

References

Harris, T. & K. Franklin (2000). *Shrikes and Bush-Shrikes: Including Wood-shrikes, Helmet-shrikes, Flycatcher-shrikes, Philentomas, Batises and Wattle-eyes.* Christopher Helm, London, 392pp.

King, H. (2017). Predation of a Northern Wheatear - the hunting technique of an Isabelline Shrike. https://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/v2/Content/Predation-of-a-Northern-Wheatear.aspx?s_id=54237732. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

Lefranc, N. & T. Worfolk (1997). *Shrikes: A Guide to the Shrikes of the World.* Pica Press, Sussex, England, 192 pp.

Patel, V. & P. Maheria (2016). Isabelline Shrike preying on pipit. *Flamingo* XIV(3): 8–9.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Dr. Bakul Trivedi for providing a copy of the relevant issue of *Flamingo* (Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat).

Gurpartap Singh¹ & Swarn Singh²

¹ 1969, Sector 64, Mohali, Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar District, Punjab 160062, India.

² Village Chhoti Odian, P.O. Karni Khera, Tehsil & District Fazilka, Punjab 152123, India.

Emails: ¹prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com (corresponding author), ²singh.swarn6@gmail.com

Citation: Singh, G. & S. Singh (2024). Predation of a Bluethroat by an Isabelline Shrike. *Bird-o-soar* #245, In: *Zoo's Print* 39(8): 26–27.