

Bay-backed Shrike inhabits semi-arid thorny country

Habitat:

Open or lightly wooded thorny scrub and semi-arid country; at the edge of agricultural fallow land; avoid forests; rare on the coasts.

Distribution:

Entire India, Nepal, Pakistan, Persia, Afghanistan and Transcaspia.

Habit:

Arboreal and semi-terrestrial in widely separated pairs. Perch on bushes, wires or poles. Swiftly fly close to the ground.

Food:

Carnivorous. Grub, insects (ants, beetles, caterpillars, grasshoppers); arachnids (scorpions, sun-spiders); lizards, chameleon, geckos, skinks, rodents and amphibians; rarely small birds.



Flying close to the ground in search of prey (Inset-A beetle impaled on a thorn)



Food items like the black ant and grass-hoppers are taken from the ground while, winged insects are taken in flight

Larder:

Surplus prey hunted in the morning is impaled on thorns, spikes, barbs, and this is meticulously guarded. It is consumed in the noon or is fed to the chicks. Sometimes excess prey is left to dry or is stolen by other birds.



A beetle and a winged insect are impaled on a thorn, hence the name 'Butcher Bird'

Phenology:



A pair on the nest in a thorny tree

Newly hatched naked chicks



An egg in a cup nest

Three days old chicks with eyes closed



Five days old chicks demanding food





32 days old chick



35 days old chick

Courtship is by perching together, body touching, tail cocking, calling, and chasing rival males. Mutual feeding is seen. Eggs are laid in one to two days interval.

Flight:

Swift with rapid wing beats. Wing mirrors flash in flight.



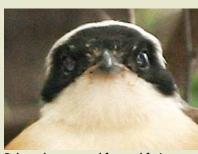
Key Features:



Eye mask in side view



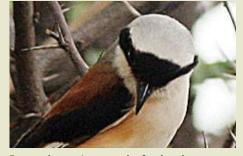
Typical bay-colour of the back



Pale underparts and forward facing eyes



Juvenile plumage



Eye mask meeting over the forehead

- Sexes alike.
- Grey-white head.
- Black eye mask meets on the forehead.
- In female the frontal band is narrower than in male.
- Chestnut-maroon bay-coloured back.
- Black wings with round white mirrors, seen in flight.
- White rump; black and white tail.
- Bill dark, horny, hooked, hawk-like.
- Leg, feet, claws dark.

Etymology:

Lanius vittatus: L. Lanius – an executioner, a butcher.
L. vittatus – banded, striped (vitta, ribbon). Shrikes or 'Butcher Birds' store cached prey by impaling on sharp objects, thereby showing resemblance to a slaughter house.

Cultural aspects:

The Marathi name 'khatik' alludes to a butcher, from the prey impaling habit of this shrike.

Amazing Facts:





Multiple beetles and a chameleon are impaled on thorns

Shrikes are large-headed intelligent carnivorous birds. Shrikes often hunt in pairs thereby achieving a high predation success. They swiftly impale prey on thorns, however caching is practiced by the Bay-backed species to a lesser extent than in Grev and Long-tailed shrikes.

Economic Importance and Threats:





Calling from the nest

Harsh calls, warbles, chuckles, mews and mimicry of several coinhabiting scrubland

Legal protection:

The shrikes devour insects, act as bio-control agents and are beneficial to agricultural economy. Development projects leading to

habitat loss are a major threat. In the past three

decades several shrike habitats are destroyed

and the populations of shrikes has reduced..

Recently included in Schedule IV of WildLife (Protection) Act (1972).

Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus* (Valenciennes, 1826)

Type Locality – Pondicherry Khatik (Marathi); Pachanak (Hindi); Pachnal laturo (Gujarati); Khayeri karkata (Bengali); Asurakkili (Malyalam); Veena dega (Telugu); **Kichin karuvi** (Tamil).

- **Length:** 180 mm.
- **Wing:** 82 90 mm
- **Bill:** 15 18 mm.
- **Tarsus:** 21 24 mm
- **Tail:** 81 96 mm
- **Weight:** 18 to 24 g
- Sexual Maturity: probably 2 y
- Breeding Season: March to September.
- **Clutch:** 2 5 eggs once or twice a year
- **Eggs:** 20.8 x 15.7 mm. Ovoid. Variable.

Spotted, blotched with purple, green and brown, more on broad end.

- Incubation: Both sexes. 18 – 19 days.
- Life span: About 14 years.



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- Chief Editor: Dr. Satish Pande
- Associate Editor: Rajkumar Pawar • Photographs: Dr. Satish Pande,
- Rajkumar Pawar, Prashant Deshpande and Pramod Deshpance
- Design: Kiran Velhankar, MediaNext Infoprocessors Pvt. Ltd.
- Copyright and Published by: Ela Foundation, C-9, Bhosale Park, Sahakarnagar-2, Pune 411009. July, 2014. An OENSL initiative. www. elafoundation.org.
- References: Ali Salim and S. Dillon Ripley (1969) Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford University Press, Bombay; vol 3: 1-325.
- Recommended Citation: Pande. Satish and Raikumar Pawar (2016). Bay-backed Shrike. *Ela File* No. 28. pp 1-6.



Bay-backed Shrike

- Order: Passeriformes Family: Laniidae
- **Status:** Resident

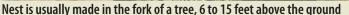
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Parent shuffling the eggs in the deep nest cup

A tight compact, deep cup externally bound with cobwebs and made from twigs, rags, litter, hair, wool, thread, grass, and lined with leaves. Both sexes build the nest, incubate eggs and feed the brood. If two broods are raised in a year, same or different nests may be used. More than one or more nests may be seen in a territory.

Nest site:

2 to 5 m up in the fork of Neem, Acacia sp, Prosopis sp., Zizyphus sp. etc. Old and new nests may be seen together, but only one nest and one pair active per tree.







Parent incubating the eggs; an attentive pair with a nestling; chick peeps out from under the belly of the parent







Parent flying with fecal sac of the nestling; parents feeding the chick in the nest and on a branch

Field work and research on the Bay-backed Shrike was done by Dr. Satish Pande, Rajkumar Pawar, Pramod Deshpande, Prashant Deshpande, Rahul Lonkar and Amit Pawashe for over 13 years.