



Bay-backed Shrike inhabits semi-arid thorny country

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



An egg in a cup nest



3 - 5 eggs are laid per clutch



Newly hatched naked chicks



Three days old chicks with eyes closed



Five days old chicks demanding food



14 days old chicks snugly fitting in the nest



32 days old chick



35 days old chick



38 days old brancher

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.



Flight sequence of a shrike while hunting prey.

Key Features:



Eye mask in side view



Eye mask meeting over the forehead



Typical bay-colour of the back



Pale underparts and forward facing eyes



Juvenile plumage

- 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 Grey and Long-tailed shrikes.

Economic Importance and Threats:



Insect sanitizer of cropland

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..



Calling from the nest

Call:

Harsh calls, warbles, chuckles, mews and mimicry of several co-inhabiting scrubland birds.

Legal

protection:

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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Bay-backed Shrike

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

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Nest is usually made in the fork of a tree, 6 to 15 feet above the ground



Parent shuffling the eggs in the deep nest cup

Nest:

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.

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