

The owl and its prey dropped down and out of my sight behind buildings, whereupon I jumped into my car and drove around frantically trying to find where the owl had come down. I wanted to determine, if possible, its age and sex. Finally, I parked the car, hurried over the top of a pile of snow and ran down a railroad track into the cold wind, searching wildly. It was a strong cold wind, the temperature, as I later learned, being -20°C . I couldn't find the owl, but there were a dozen large flat roofs nearby and I concluded that the owl must have landed on top of one of them, out of sight. My impression is that the owl was mostly white, perhaps an adult male or female, but viewing conditions were poor.

The more I watch Snowy Owls, the more impressed I am with their ver-

satility. Usually, I just drive around in the country counting them, marveling at their ability to perch high on top of steel hydro towers at -30°C with a strong wind blowing. Thirty years ago in the *Blue Jay*, I described the capture of a Lesser Scaup by a Snowy Owl.³ This present observation of a Snowy Owl capturing a Rock Dove as adeptly as a Peregrine Falcon has further enhanced my image of this large raptor.

1. JOHNSGARD, P.A. 1988. North American owls. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 295 pp.
2. MIKKOLA, H. 1983. Owls of Europe. Buteo Books, Vermillion, South Dakota. 397 pp.
3. NERO, R.W. 1964. Snowy Owl captures duck. *Blue Jay* 22: 54-55.



JANUARY SIGHTING OF A NORTHERN SHRIKE IN REGINA

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During the particular cold week of 12-19 January 1994, an especially interesting guest visited our yard in southeast Regina, Saskatchewan. Our family had been enjoying the company of redpolls, Pine Siskins, nuthatches and chickadees at our two bird feeders throughout December. On 12 January, shortly after 12:00 p.m. a Northern Shrike landed in an apple tree. It proceeded to finish eating something it had caught. Wayne (Pepper) and I were unsure if its prey was one of our regular visitors since we could not clearly identify it.

Although both the Northern and Loggerhead Shrike are grey and black birds with white breasts, our visitor had a black mask through the eyes, not an eye bar which is characteristic of the Loggerhead Shrike.¹ As well, the Loggerhead Shrike only winters from the north-central United States southward.¹ Since the wind chill factor was approximately 2300 at the time of the sightings, we were convinced that we were actually observing a species which is known to wander as far south as Regina in mid-winter.

On 16 January, Wayne first spotted a flash of two birds speeding around and behind the spruce trees in the back yard. Almost instantly the shrike reappeared carrying a Red-breasted Nuthatch in its bill. Losing its grip the shrike dropped the nuthatch into the deep snow on the lawn but immediately retrieved it. The nuthatch was already limp and motionless. The shrike carried the nuthatch approximately 10 ft. to the same apple tree used previously on January 12th and proceeded to lodge it in the crotch of a branch. The bird immediately tore off the head of its prey then flew with it to a nearby tree. Repeated attempts to lodge the head between branches were made until the head did not fall to the ground. Once the head was firmly in place, the shrike tore off pieces of flesh which it ate immediately.

After the head was eaten, the shrike returned to the first tree and firmly lodged the remaining body in the crotch of two branches and continued its meal. However, it did not eat the entire body in the time we were watching. Once the shrike was satisfied, it tore off a couple of the larger pieces and flew to different nearby trees where it appeared to be

storing portions of food for future meals.

Once finished feeding and storing its extra food, the shrike sat on a lower branch of the apple tree and watched Pine Siskins that had returned to the feeder some 2.5 to 3 m away. After roughly ten minutes the shrike flew away without attempting to catch a Pine Siskin.

On 19 January, a Northern Shrike was again observed briefly in our backyard. It swooped through the trees a couple of times, but once it landed it was apparent to Carolyn (Pepper) and myself that its hunt in our yard had not been successful. It did scare the other birds away for a few hours.

We felt privileged to have viewed this small example of backyard ecology, particularly in light of the fact that only one Northern Shrike was observed in all of Regina during the 1993 Boxing Day Bird Count.²

1. GODFREY, W.E. 1986. The birds of Canada. National Museum of Canada, Ottawa. 595 pp.
2. BJORKLUND, C. 1994. Regina Natural History Society Newsletter, January/February. p.5.



Hearing birds: Experienced birders can do a lot of their identifying by ear. Theodore Parker of the United States, who died last year in a plane crash, was perhaps the world's leading ornithologist, writes Sarah Engham of the Baltimore Sun. He could identify 3,500 or so species of birds by their songs alone. Two years before his death, being interviewed in the Ecuadorean jungle, he heard a bird. "That accelerated sort of staccato is a blue-tailed trogon. I've never heard it before," he said. Asked how, then, he knew it, he replied: "Because it's the only neotropical trogon I haven't heard." *Bird-watching. The Globe and Mail, 8 March 1994.*