

ON THE STATUS OF THE GRAY SHRIKE, COLLECTED BY CAPT.
BLAKISTON, IN YEZO, JAPAN.

BY
LEONHARD STEJNEGER.

A recent paper by Mr. H. E. Dresser (Remarks on *Lanius excubitor* and its Allies < Ibis, 1892, pp. 374-380), and especially his remarks on p. 378, on a certain specimen of gray shrike from the island of Askold, near Vladivostok, in Eastern Siberia, led me to re-examine the only Japanese specimen ever taken, viz, U. S. National Museum, No. 96136, (Blakist., No. 1097, ♀; Mohitze, Yezo, March 9, 1873). The two localities are nearly under the same latitude (43° and 42° N.), and almost facing each other across the Japanese Sea.

Mr. Dresser describes the Askold specimen "as having no trace of vermiculations on the under parts, nor any trace of brown in the plumage, but it has a single alar bar, and has the rump and upper tail-coverts pure white," and he considers it "extremely puzzling," because, as he says, "in all the large series which I have examined this is the only specimen I have met with lacking the vermiculations on the underparts and all trace of the brown tinge in the plumage." However, it is plain from his subsequent argument and from the way he quotes Mr. Bogdanow in regard to the American *L. borealis*, that he believes the latter to be more or less brownish, even the fully adult. It is evident, then, that he is not acquainted with the adult *L. borealis*, which is quite as pure gray as *L. excubitor*, and if Mr. Dresser in all the large series he has examined has not seen an adult *L. borealis*, one might be tempted to believe that he has not met with the adult *L. major* (*Auctorum* nec WILKES), or *L. sibiricus*, as it is preferable to call it, except the Askold specimen.

The Japanese specimen above alluded to agrees in every particular with Dresser's description of the Askold bird. But, on the other hand, it also agrees most minutely (except outer tail-feather, which is whiter, a character of no value in these birds) with a specimen from Russia (U. S. Nat. Mus. No. 98550). Now, Dresser considers the European specimens unworthy of even subspecific rank (tom. cit., p. 375), but, if so, he ought to call the Askold and the Yezo birds *L. excubitor* pure and simple. I do not think he will do so; but then the Russian and the Askold-Yezo birds are most assuredly identical and indistinguish-

able, even by a splitter of so horrible a reputation as myself. What are we going to do in this dilemma?

Someone "anxious to lump" might take the horn of considering it now demonstrated that as (1) the European specimens with a single alar speculum have been "proven" to be nothing but *L. excubitor*, and (2) the eastern Asiatic birds are indistinguishable from these, the so-called *L. sibiricus* is also "proven" to be *L. excubitor* pure and simple; furthermore, as (3) it has also been "proven" that *L. borealis* is not even subspecifically distinct from *L. sibiricus* (Dresser, loc. cit., p. 379), it follows that even the North American bird must stand as *L. excubitor*. There seems to be some logic in this, yet I doubt if anyone will be bold enough to draw the consequences.

The other horn is this: The American adult bird (*L. borealis*), and I wish it understood that I speak of the adult birds alone, as I do not think it possible to separate all the young birds, is always* distinguished by having the under side cross vermiculated, and has always a single wing speculum; *L. sibiricus* also has a single wing speculum, but the fully adult bird is pure white underneath; *L. excubitor*, unmixed, has a double wing speculum. *L. borealis* is strictly confined to North America; *L. sibiricus* occurs from the Japanese Sea all through northern Siberia and northern Russia to Norwegian Finmark; *L. excubitor*, unmixed, is confined to central and southeastern Europe (broadly speaking). The boundaries of the two latter forms do now meet, or in certain places even overlap, interbreeding and consequent intermediate specimens being the result; but I have reason to believe that this meeting of the two species, in some places, at least, is of comparatively recent date.

The very great uniformity which *L. sibiricus* shows over such an enormous area, from the Pacific to the Atlantic oceans, as evidenced by the specimens referred to above, speaks in favor of its stability and its distinctness. And this point alone, if there were no others, is sufficient to induce me to select the latter horn of the dilemma. Whether this view of the case is the true one I think is beyond anybody's power to say for the present, for I do not believe that there is enough material in any one museum or city to decide, and I even doubt that all the specimens in St. Petersburg, London, and Washington to-day, if brought together, would settle the question beyond dispute.

In the mean time I think it perfectly safe to call the species from Askold and from Yezo *Lanius sibiricus* (Bogdanow).

* "Always" in the sense which does not preclude possible exceptions due to individual variation.