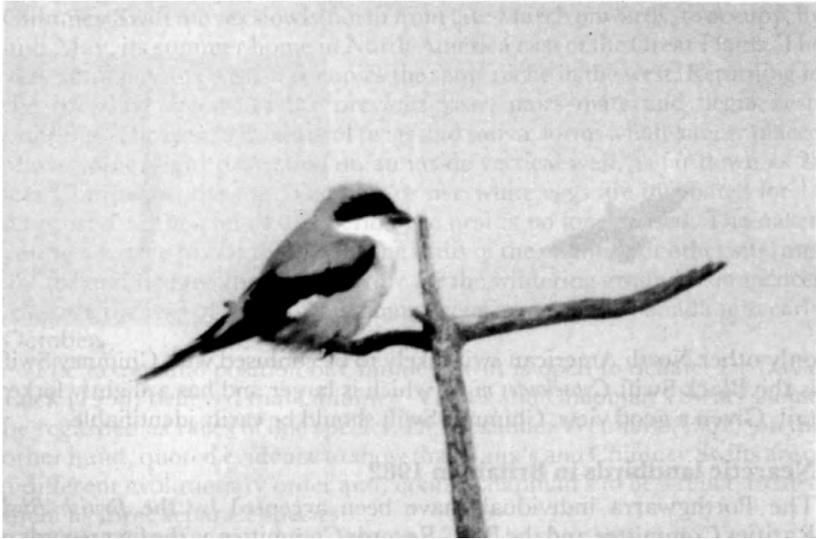


Mystery photographs



117 Perched conspicuously on a vantage point, and displaying strongly contrasted tri-coloured plumage (predominantly pale body plumage, but with a bold mask and strikingly black-and-white wings), last month's mystery bird (plate 211, repeated here) will have been identified readily by most readers as one of the grey shrikes *Lanius*. But which one: Great Grey Shrike *L. excubitor* or Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor*?

Judging the size of a lone individual can be difficult, but there are important structural clues to be noted. The bill of Lesser Grey Shrike is short but deep, producing a distinctly stubby profile which the longer, finer bill of Great Grey lacks. Even more significant are the relative lengths of wing and tail. The wing of Great Grey Shrike is relatively short: on the folded wing the third, fourth and fifth primaries are bunched closely at the tip, with three to five further primary tips discernible beyond the longest tertial. The length of the primary projection is about three-quarters that of the exposed tertials. In normal posture, the tips of the wings fall at the base of the tail and somewhat short of the tips of the uppertail-coverts; thus, the genuinely long tail is given even greater emphasis. By contrast, Lesser Grey has a comparatively short tail and long wings. The third primary is longest, with a further five to seven well-spaced primary tips visible beyond the longest tertial. The length of the primary projection is about one-and-a-quarter times that of the exposed tertials and laps the base of the tail to an extent usually exceeding the tips of the uppertail-coverts. Lesser Grey thus has a more compact, less top-heavy appearance than the rangey, ample-tailed Great Grey.

A further look at the mystery photograph, which was taken by Andrew Moon in East Sussex in July 1982, reveals bill-shape, wing-shape and wing/tail position all indicative of Lesser Grey, and this is confirmed by the very extensive black mask, which extends conspicuously across the forehead (and, indeed, reaches its greatest depth at this point). It should be noted, however, that the black on the forehead of female Lesser Grey Shrike is frequently strongly admixed with grey, while on first-year individuals the forehead may lack black entirely. Conversely, the forehead of Great Grey may in certain circumstances appear deceptively dark (see *Brit. Birds* 36: 51-53 for a notorious example). Thus, when confronted by a grey shrike—particularly an unseasonal individual—it is essential to check structure as well as plumage.

232. Mystery photograph 118. Identify the species. Answer next month



Great Grey Shrike shows a white supercilium, and, on the nominate race, the white wing-bar extends from the base of the primaries onto the secondaries. On Lesser Grey, the wing-bar is broader, but confined to the primaries; southern forms of Great Grey Shrike, however, may show a rather similarly shaped wing-bar: another reason for checking structural features before finalising the identification.

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