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New record of Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) in extreme southern Algeria

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Abstract - In this work, we review past records of the Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* in Algeria. Furthermore, we report a new observation of the species made in November 2023 of a juvenile individual spotted in Tawandert in the extreme south of Algeria. The identification was based on the observed plumage characteristics, including a greyish-brown crown and nape, pale rufous back, and faint barring above and below, with the white primary patch already visible. This record, following one in Djanet in 1960 and another in Bou Hanifia in 1977, represents the third for this species in Algeria and the first sighting in over 50 years, as well as the first documented occurrence in the southern Sahara region of the country of a species that normally follows an easterly route during post-breeding migration.

Key words: Red-backed Shrike, North Africa, Tin Zaouatine, Sahara, migration, accidental visitor, Laniidae.

Riassunto - Questo studio esamina le segnalazioni di Averla piccola *Lanius collurio* in Algeria e riporta una nuova osservazione della specie effettuata nel novembre 2023. Un individuo in piumaggio giovanile è stato avvistato a Tawandert, nell'estremo sud del Paese. L'identificazione è stata basata su caratteristiche distintive del piumaggio, tra cui vertice e nuca grigio-brune, dorso rossiccio pallido, leggere barrature su parti superiori e inferiori, e la presenza di una macchia bianca sulle primarie. Questa osservazione, che segue i precedenti record di Djanet (1960) e Bou Hanifia (1977), rappresenta il terzo avvistamento per questa specie in Algeria, il primo dopo oltre 50 anni e la prima documentazione nella regione del Sahara meridionale di una specie che normalmente segue un rotta orientale durante la migrazione post-riproduttiva.

Parole chiave: Averla piccola, Nord Africa, Tin Zaouatine, Sahara, migrazione, visitatore accidentale, Laniidae.

The Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) exhibits a broad distribution across the Western Palearctic, with its range extending into parts of the Eastern Palearctic (Lefranc, 2022). Geographically, its distribution spans from northwestern Portugal in the west to Siberia in the east. The westernmost limit of its range follows the northern coastline of the Iberian Peninsula and the French Atlantic coast; however, areas such as Brittany and Normandy are largely excluded from its distribution (Tellería, 2018; Lefranc, 2022).

The Red-backed Shrike is primarily known for its eastern migration routes. European populations of this species migrate predominantly along the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, even those breeding in southwestern France, northern Spain, and Portugal (Tøttrup *et al.*, 2017, Lefranc, 2022). These birds follow an eastward trajectory in autumn, before heading south-east, performing a loop migration similar to that of the Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*) (Dowsett, 1971).

An observation of the Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*), was made on 4 November 2023 in Tawandert, located in the extreme south of Algeria. This sighting provides a rare and noteworthy addition to the records of this species in the region, particularly in the Saharan zone. The observed individual, identified as a juvenile, displayed diagnostic features such as a greyish-brown crown and nape, a pale rufous back, and faint barring on both the upperparts and underparts. The characteristic white primary patch was already visible in this individual (Fig 1). In Algeria, the family Laniidae is represented by four species: the Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*), which is sedentary; the Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*), a migratory breeder; the Red-tailed Shrike (*Lanius phoenicuroides*), observed for the first time on 9 October 2020 in Skikda; and the Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*), considered an accidental visitor (Isenmann & Moali, 2000; Magornitho, 2020).

Records of the Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) in Algeria are extremely scarce, with historical observations including a specimen captured in October 1960 in Djanet/Tassili and a male observed on 1 April 1977 near Bou Hanifia (Isenmann & Moali, 2000). In North Africa, the species has been occasionally recorded during autumn (September–October) in Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, and the Cape Verde Islands, while spring observations include individuals in Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco. Notably, a female observed at Makthar, Tunisia, on 5 January 1972, was far outside the species' typical wintering range (Thévenot *et al.*, 2003; Isenmann *et al.*, 2000; 2005; 2010). This new sighting in Tin Zaouatine thus represents only the third record for Algeria and the first in over 50 years, highlighting the rarity of the species in the country.

This observation contributes to our understanding of the migratory behaviour of the Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) and its occasional occurrence in the southern Sahara. It suggests that parts of the Algerian Sahara may serve as stopover sites or form part of an extended migratory route, despite being located outside the species' typical migratory corridors. Consequently, further ornithological monitoring and studies are essential to better understand the ecological conditions that facilitate such occurrences in the region, emphasising the importance of continued surveys to document rare or unexpected bird species in southern Algeria. Examples include the Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*), Blue-naped Mousebird (*Urocolius macrourus*), African Grey Woodpecker (*Dendropicos goertae*), White-throated Bee-eater (*Merops albicollis*), African Green Bee-eater (*Merops viridissimus*), and Cricket Warbler (*Spiloptila clamans*) (Boulaouad *et al.*, 2022; 2023a; 2023b; 2024).

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Fig. 1 – Juvenile Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) in southern Algeria.