



# Biodiversity Observations

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## LESSER GREY SHRIKE AND COMMON FISCAL IMPALING PREY

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## PREDATION

### LESSER GREY SHRIKE AND COMMON FISCAL IMPALING PREY

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This paper provides three records of shrikes impaling prey.

#### Lesser Grey Shrike -> Southern Masked Weaver

During a BirdLife Free State outing to Soetdoring Nature Reserve (28°49'S; 26°07'E) on 5 April 2003, several migrant species were still observed on the reserve, a time when migrant species are more silent and making ready for migration. When the group entered the reserve, a lonely Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* was observed in a thick *Acacia* clump next to the road and further on, near where the reserve road split to the picnic sites, both Lesser Grey *Lanius minor* and Red-backed Shrikes *L. collurio* were observed in the same area.

At about 13:00 while on the way leaving the reserve, one Lesser Grey Shrike was again observed in the same area where it had been observed earlier that morning. The shrike was sitting on a fence and flew away when the vehicles were driving near the fence. To the surprise of most of the observers, a bird was seen hanging on the barb of the wire on the fence, probably impaled by the Lesser Grey Shrike. On close investigation it was found that the prey was still fresh and was identified as a juvenile Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus*.

#### Common Fiscal -> grasshopper

During the PAOC12 at Goudini, Western Cape, a Common Fiscal *L. collaris* (ringed) was observed feeding on a grasshopper species on 11 September 2008 (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** The ringed Common Fiscal in a thorny bush with its grasshopper prey at Goudini Spa, Rawsonville.

#### Common Fiscal -> African Quail Finch

During SABAP2 surveys in the Jagersfontein district, Free State, on 13 June 2009, a beheaded African Quail Finch *Ortygozpiza atricollis* was found on a fence, possibly the work of a Common Fiscal (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** An African Quail Finch impaled on the wire of the fence in the Jagersfontein district. It was early in the morning when the carcass was found - water droplets were still visible

### Discussion

The Lesser Grey Shrike is known to impale its prey, mostly larger invertebrates, but no bird species have been recorded (Herremans 2005).

The Common Fiscal is well known to impale prey items on barbed wires of fences or thorns of trees (Dean 2005). Common Fiscals have been observed to impale bird species such as Wailing Cisticola *Cisticola lais*, Levallant's Cisticola *C. tinniens*, Stonechat *Saxicola*

*torquata* and Cape Sparrows *Passer melanurus* (De Swardt 1989; 1990; Claassen & Claassen 1989). Roos (1988) observed a Common Fiscal catch a House Sparrow *P. domesticus* and impale it on a sharp thorn of a bush and later saw the shrike return to its prey to feed on stored food. It has also been suggested that the shrikes exploit the insects that are attracted to the decaying animal matter (Harris & Arnott 1988). Shrikes may use the "thorns" of trees or wires to better hold the food item to feed on it.

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