

## LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE FEEDS ON A DEAD AMERICAN COOT

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In the early afternoon of 8 December 1984, we observed a Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) feeding on the carcass of an American Coot (*Fulica americana*) along the shore of a marsh at Chula Vista, San Diego County, California. For about 2.5 min the shrike tore off and swallowed at least a dozen pieces of meat before flying away. After waiting 30 min for the shrike to return, we examined the carcass. The head of the coot was missing; the shrike had been feeding on the blood-clotted meat in the neck area. No mammal tracks, scattered feathers, talon or tooth punctures, or maggots were evident. The coot was lying under the high-voltage power lines, suggesting that it died after colliding with the power lines.

Either the shrike found the coot dead or it successfully attacked and killed an unusually large item of prey. Both the Northern Shrike (*L. excubitor*) and Loggerhead Shrike are well known for their predatory habits, but they seldom feed on carrion. Bent (1950:117) reported a Northern Shrike feeding on a dead cow, Lloyd (1887) observed a Loggerhead Shrike feeding on a dead sheep, Anderson (1976) noted Loggerhead Shrikes eating the remains of prey left by Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*) and a Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), and Reid and Fulbright (1981) found the impaled remains of two coots presumably cached by Loggerhead Shrikes. Lloyd (1887) speculated that shrikes may resort to carrion more often during the winter when normal food items are scarce. In support of this, Craig (1979) found that in central California in December the density of Loggerhead Shrike prey was low and that shrikes were apparently stressed, as evidenced by two collected individuals that were well below mean weight. Perhaps our Loggerhead Shrike was similarly stressed and opportunistically fed on the coot carcass.

Since the shrike was feeding on the neck, where shrikes typically attack prey (Miller 1931, Smith 1973), it may have killed the coot. Although Cade (1962) gave 80-100 g as the weight of the largest prey the slightly larger Northern Shrike (average weight ca. 60 g) can handle, White (1963) observed a Northern Shrike unsuccessfully attack a Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*; ca. 675 g), Ellison (1971) saw a Northern Shrike unsuccessfully attack a Spruce Grouse (*Dendragapus canadensis*; ca. 600 g), and Balda (1965) witnessed a Loggerhead Shrike successfully attack a Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*; ca. 130 g).

Slack (1975) demonstrated that shrikes normally select smaller, easier-to-catch prey rather than larger prey that once captured provides more food. He suggested that shrikes attack unusually large prey only when motivated by severe hunger. Although our shrike may have been exceptionally hungry, because Loggerhead Shrikes are not known to kill prey larger than the ca. 130-g dove, we suspect the shrike discovered the coot as carrion. Shrikes probably feed on carrion more frequently than the literature suggests.

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