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Cover: Digital illustration of *Impatiens chamchumroonii* in Krita by Dupati Poojitha.



Sighting of vagrant Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* in the coastal areas of Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, India

Kishore Muthu¹ , Anand Shibu²  & Santhanakrishnan Babu³ 

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Shrikes (genus *Lanius*) are medium-sized passerines known for their distinctive predatory behaviour. India has 14 species of shrikes, comprising resident, migratory, and vagrant species (Lefranc & Worfolk 2013; Praveen & Jayapal 2025). The resident shrikes are the Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*, Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*, Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*, and Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor lahtore*. The winter migrants to the country are Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, and Burmese Shrike *Lanius collurio*. Vagrants such as the Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*, Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*, Tiger Shrike *Lanius tigrinus*, Red-tailed Shrike *Lanius phoenicuroides*, Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, and Giant Shrike *Lanius giganteus* are occasionally recorded. In Peninsular India, the Long-tailed Shrike, Bay-backed Shrike, Brown Shrike, and Isabelline Shrike are commonly recorded, while the Red-backed Shrike is a vagrant to peninsular India.

As part of a bird survey, we have been surveying wetland and terrestrial habitats within the coastal zones of Tamil Nadu State for both migratory and resident birds. We included terrestrial habitats (e.g., shrubs and mixed woodlands) because they often support passerine passage migrants that winter in Sri Lanka.

During one such survey in the Thoothukudi District, we encountered a shrike near the Periyasamy Puram salt pan (9.071° N, 78.322° E) on 02 November 2025. It exhibited some distinctive plumage patterns compared to other shrike species common to this site. Therefore, a series of photos was taken using a NIKON D7200 for further identification. Upon careful examination of the photographs and field notes, we confirmed the shrike's identity as a Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* based on unique plumage characteristics. The same individual was observed at the same location on 06 November, confirming that this vagrant had remained in the area for at least four days.

The key identification features of an adult male are a grey crown, a bold black mask, a bright chestnut back, and a grey rump, along with a distinctive tail pattern characterized by white bases that form a "T" shape in flight. The Red-backed Shrike is a long-distance migratory bird, which primarily uses the Eastern Mediterranean–Middle Eastern–East African flyway (BirdLife International 2024). It breeds across the Palearctic region, including most of Europe, and winters in southern and eastern Africa (Lefranc & Worfolk 2013; Yosef et al. 2020).

Apart from the present sightings, there is one

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Image 1. Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* sighted in the saltpans of Thoothukudi District, Tamil Nadu. © Anand Shibu.

previous sighting record of this species from Tamil Nadu, observed in 2023 at the Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, Nagapattinam (Haemoglobin 2023). Furthermore, several observations of the species were recorded in Adayar, Chennai, during December 2025 and have been submitted to eBird (e.g., Kesavan 2025). Along its broader migratory route, it is reported in the northwestern part of the country. A substantial number of sighting reports are available on eBird from Gujarat, with a few scattered sightings from Rajasthan and Maharashtra (eBird 2025). Most of these records were reported between August and November. However, due to the limited sighting records from this region, the species is considered a vagrant in southern India. Continuous monitoring of wetland and terrestrial habitats of the East Coast of Tamil Nadu areas may shed more light on several passage migrants and vagrants to India.

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