

The Birds Of South Gloucestershire

WOODCHAT SHRIKE - *Lanius senator*

Chipping Sodbury Common, S. Gloucestershire: 30th July – 21st August 2011



1st summer female Woodchat Shrike - Gary Thoburn

On Saturday 30th July my partner Claire and I decided to go for a late afternoon walk around Chipping Sodbury Common. We were hoping to find some Yellow Wagtails amongst the cattle as good numbers had been reported up at Slimbridge. I regularly check the common, especially over migration periods as it is a regular stop off point for commoner migrants like Common Redstart, Whinchat and Northern Wheatear.

When we arrived at the common the cows were nowhere to be seen. We went off to look for them and eventually could see them in a field just beyond the edge of the common. We decided to head over and as we were walking I commented about how quiet it seemed for birds.

It was then that I saw a bird sat atop of a small bush. I couldn't identify it with my binoculars so I set up my scope and looked through it. "It's a Shrike" I exclaimed followed by a torrent of expletives.

The bird sat still and allowed us good views to determine that it was a female Woodchat Shrike. The bird showed a rufous cap, which was very bleached or washed out and broad white wing bars.

I made a few calls and thankfully other birders soon arrived to see the bird.

Remarkably it stayed until the 21st August even allowing me to see it again after going to Scotland on holiday for two weeks. The bird was well twitched by local birders and even some from the Midlands. I would often encounter birders looking for it and remember one time when I could see a birder looking for it and the bird was sat up behind him, prompting me to shout in a pantomime style "It's behind you"

Darren Pearce – September 2011

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1st summer female Woodchat Shrike - Gary Thoburn

Woodchat Shrike breeds largely in the Mediterranean and in some areas they share habitat with Red-backed Shrike. They generally occur in semi-open areas with bushes and well spaced trees, such as open woodland, old orchards, gardens and parks or hedges with large thorny bushes. In Spain they favour Holm and Cork Oak up to c. 2000 metres and in the Pyrenees they are found up to c. 1500 metres. In north-west Africa they also favour open oak forests, but does occur commonly in cultivated country with trees.



There are four recognized races with the nominate race (*Lanius senator*) occupying most of mainland European. *Lanius s. rutilans* is found in Iberia and north-west Africa, *Lanius s. badius* from the Balearic Islands and *Lanius s. niloticus* from Cyprus and Levant eastwards.

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1st summer female Woodchat Shrike - Len Ingram



1st summer female Woodchat Shrike - Allan Chard

Previous records:

Woodchat Shrike occurs about twenty times per annum in the UK but only three have made it to S. Gloucestershire. The first was on July 23rd 1989 when a worn adult female was identified in fields north of Rushmead Lane near Marshfield. Present for just one day it had departed overnight and was not seen subsequently.



Woodchat Shrike at Marshfield in July 1989 - Mark Coller

The second an adult was seen on April 22nd 1994 near Morton Farm, Thornbury and the third, this 1st summer female present on Chipping Sodbury Common, from July 30th until at least August 21st.

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1st summer female Woodchat Shrike – Andy Jordan

Second calendar year birds can be aged at close range because they retain some juvenile feathers especially some inner primaries, secondaries and primary coverts. Old feathers, particularly the primaries appear much more worn than the new replacements. In females the difference in colouration between new and old feathers is often much less pronounced. They may also retain a few barred juvenile body feathers.

The overall 'worn' appearance of the Chipping Sodbury 1st summer female and what appears to be an element of 'bleaching' is in fact indicative of immaturity.