

Southern Grey Shrike

A new species for Kent

J Mills

On Sunday 7th November 2004 I received a phone call from my friend Dave Dowell advising me of a grey shrike he'd seen in his area, "would I like to come over and have a look"

I met up with him an hour or so later and we set off. He said that the bird had been reported to him by a friend of his who farmed in the area and was on his land. We parked up on the farmland and set off towards the river Stour.

Suddenly, there it was, perched on a post and sticking out like a sore thumb! From time to time it would fly down to some nearby disturbed ground, apparently finding food but, thankfully, always returning to the same perch. Fortunately, it shifted about on the post enabling us to photograph it from all angles.

We only had the Collins Bird Guide with us, which revealed that it wasn't a Great Grey. However, the white wing markings when perched suggested a Lesser Grey - but the mask was wrong. Was it moulting on the face? Could be - but the beak was wrong. The light faded and we went home to print up our photos and consult further tomes - which shed no further light on the matter.

I got on with my life until I met Dave the following Sunday. He said that he had shown his photo's to a mutual friend who had confidently identified it as a "Steppe" Grey Shrike and that he had tried unsuccessfully to report it online. I checked my books again. There was a reference but no picture and no description.

I didn't want to stick my neck out in reporting it, so I printed off a couple of photos on 15th Nov and posted them off to Bird Watching Magazine to let them identify it and report it at the same time. By the following weekend there had been no reply so I printed another couple of photos and sent them to RSPB Sandy on the 22nd Nov.

The next day there was an excited phone call from RSPB Sandy confirming that it was indeed a "Steppe" Grey Shrike (*Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*) and requesting that I advise the county recorder - which I did.