

Korta rapporter – *Short communications*

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The first record of melanism in the Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Första fyndet av melanism hos törnskata Lanius collurio

MICHAŁ CIACH

An atypically plumaged Red-backed Shrike was seen on 16 May 2007 near Lipnica Wielka (Carpathians, southern Poland). The bird was melanistic. The mantle was uniformly dark-brown, while wings along with their coverts were entirely blackish-brown. The head and the neck were somewhat lighter brown, and around the eye a somewhat darker mask was marked. The bottom part of the body and the tail were in the mantle colour – dark-brown. The rump and the base of the tail were somewhat lighter brown. The outer tail feathers were clearly paler – beige, fawn or whitish – and contrasted clearly with the rest of the dark-brown tail feathers. Neither on mantle and rump nor on belly and body sides were any feather pattern (vermiculations) seen. The beak was entirely blackish, while the legs were of the normal dark-grey colour. Other traits such as size, silhouette, flight and foraging behaviour were typical for the Red-backed Shrike. The observed bird appeared to be healthy. It perched and foraged together with normally plumaged male and female Red-backed Shrike. All three birds used the same scrubs and trees for perching simultaneously and did not show any aggression. The observation was made from 7.40 to 7.50 a.m., in good weather conditions at a distance of approximately 20 meters. The possibility that the bird could have been dirty was excluded due to observed tail-feathers pattern.

Bird plumage aberrations can be restricted to a

single feather, a group of feathers or may concern the entire body which changes radically the appearance of an individual bird (e.g. Short 1965, Howell et al. 1992, Clark 1998, Vittery 2005). The most striking anomalies in plumage are albinism (total or partial), resulting from the total lack of pigment production, and leucism, resulting from some other deficiency in the pigmentation process. They have been commonly recorded in many bird species (Sage 1962, Gross 1965a). A much rarer anomaly is melanism which is caused by the overdeposition of pigment (Gross 1965b). In the *Lanius* genus albinism has been recorded in Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* and both albinism and leucism in Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* (Sage 1962, Stephan & Lieder 1973, Remeus 1977). My observation is the first record of melanism in shrikes.

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Sammanfattning

En melanistisk törnskata påträffades nära Lipnica Wielka (Karpaterna, södra Polen) den 16 maj 2007. Manteln samt undersidan och stjärten var mörkbruna och vingarna med sina täckare svartbruna. Huvud och hals var något ljusare bruna och runt ögat fanns en mörk mask. Övergumpen och stjärtfjädrarnas baser var något ljusbruna. De yttre stjärtpenorna var tydligt ljusare än de inre och kontrasterade klart mot de senare. Näbben var svart och benen normalt mörkgrå. Fågelns beteende var helt normalt och den uppträdde i sällskap med två normalt färgade törnskator. Detta är det första fyndet av melanism hos någon törnskata.

Michał Ciach, Department of Forest Zoology and Wildlife Management, Faculty of Forestry, University of Agriculture, al. 29 Listopada 46, 31-425 Kraków, Poland. E-mail: mciach@ar.krakow.pl

Long handling time of a big prey – Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* foraging on frog

*Lång hanteringstid för ett stort byte – trastsångare *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* sväljer en groda*

DARIUSZ JAKUBAS & KATARZYNA
WOJCZULANIS-JAKUBAS

The diet of the Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* includes mainly small invertebrates (insects and some spiders and snails), but also larger items like frogs of a length up to 3 cm (predominantly newly metamorphosed) and small lizards have been recorded (Leisler 1991, Cramp 1998, Bairlein 2006). The feeding techniques of the Great Reed Warbler are not as well studied as in other *Acrocephalus* species. Many of the more frequent prey items (dragonfly nymphs, aquatic beetles and their larvae, aquatic *Hemiptera*, fish fry) are presumably taken from the water surface or just beneath (Cramp 1998). Handling of larger food items like a fully developed frog has not yet been described. However, it has been reported that the closely similar Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* killed small young frogs,

knocking them against the ground before swallowing (Zarudnyi 1896 after Cramp 1998).

On the afternoon of 22 August 2007, we witnessed an immature Great Reed Warbler which attacked, killed and consumed a fully developed frog *Rana* sp. in southern part of the “Druzno Lake” reserve (54°03'N, 19°27'E) in northern Poland. The incident occurred on the floating leaf of lesser bullrush *Typha angustifolia* in a small islet of lesser bullrush in a reservoir covered partially with water vegetation. We observed it with binoculars from a distance of 10 meters.

The frog was similar to the Great Reed Warbler's head in length, thus ca 4 cm (mean head-bill length \pm SD of seven other immature Great Reed Warblers caught in the same place in the same period was 42.9 ± 0.71 mm, and culmen was 12.3 ± 1.05 mm). Most probably it was a Pond Frog (*Rana lessonae*; body length of adult males is 4.3–7.5 cm; Berger 2000), which occurs regularly in the reserve (Nitecki 2002). The body mass of the prey frog made up approximately 22–33% of the Warbler's body mass, based on reported mass of Pond Frog 4.5–5.0 cm length (6–9 g; Juszczuk 1987) and mean body mass \pm SD of seven other immature Great Reed Warblers caught in the same place in the same period – 27.5 ± 1.70 g.

We did not observe the hunting action from the very beginning. However, our attention was drawn by the voice of the frog which had probably just been attacked and now struggled with the Warbler close to the water surface. The Great Reed Warbler was trying to seize the frog. It had difficulty maneuvering the frog into its mouth. The fifth swallowing attempt was successful. The whole handling action with the frog took at least 2 min 40 sec (from 15:48:10 to 15:50:50). After swallowing, the warbler was resting during 34 minutes (from 15:50:50 until 16:24:01). During this period, the individual was sitting on lesser bullrush leaf just above the water surface almost motionless with ruffled feathers, closed eyes and hung down wing feathers. After that it flew away.

Consuming such a big and highly caloric prey should be near the maximum momentary energy intake of Great Reed Warbler and probably compensated the time and energy expenditure of handling. On the other hand, swallowing such a big prey might have resulted in choking to death. This has been reported for e.g. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* attempting to consume European Bullhead *Cottus gobio* (Bell 1968) and Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* swallowing a Little Grebe (McCanch 2003).