

## **The Shrike and the Chickadee**

The two photos are of shrikes. The birds were temporarily stunned because they hit the windows of our house. These shrikes stunned themselves at different times, both in winter.

Shrikes are carnivorous. They are not common. You may never have seen a shrike. They make a living eating other birds. They are commonly called "butcher birds". If they have an excess of carcasses, they hang the prey birds on spiked bushes. As a pantry of sorts.

Shrikes are a bit smaller than a robin. They are compactly built, with relatively large skulls.

They are too small to quickly kill their prey like eagles or owls. If you spend enough time in the woods you may hear the screams of a shrike captive as the predator literally eats it to death.

The natural world can be harsh.

Shrikes occasionally hit our windows and stun themselves. They hit the windows as they are swooping in to capture birds from the feeders.

It happens about once a year. The stunning part I mean.

They have sturdy bodies. I have never seen one die as a result of a window collision. They are just stunned for a few minutes.

The shrikes harvest birds from the feeder as frequently as they can. That is not too often though. The prey birds get wary. The first bird to spot the shrike puts out an alarm that all small birds understand. The small birds all take cover in thick brush or simply freeze in place.

Ideally, the shrike likes to surprise and nab a bird from a feeder. They can also catch them in flight.

I once watched a shrike try to catch a chickadee in a bush.

It was winter, no leaves. The chickadee had taken cover in the bush. The shrike tried to drive the little bird out.

The bush was thick. The birds could not open their wings. The chickadee hopped from branch to branch to branch as the shrike pursued it.

The shrike intended to drive the chickadee from the bush so it could capture it in flight. Shrikes can accelerate very rapidly. They can catch small birds attempting to fly away.

The nerve of the chickadee was incredible. With amazing presence of mind, it stayed a few twigs ahead of that voracious predator, refusing to fly.

They went around and through the bush over and over.

For at least ten minutes

Eventually the shrike gave up. The chickadee lived.

There is always hope for the courageous.

1/25/2021

Hi Jeff

They are not common.

Brutal and territorial.

My first experience with a shrike was high in a tree deer hunting.

I had been there all day.

The chickadees were comfortable with me and were working next to my head.

A shrike grabbed one and killed it by eating its guts out.

The poor creature shrieked for five minutes before it died.

I sometimes tell anti-farming and anti-hunting people that every natural death is horrible.

Mercy is a human trait.

Best regards.

Tom

