

First record of Tiger shrike *Lanius tigrinus* Drapiez, 1828 (Aves: Passeriformes: Laniidae) from Bhutan

Kado Rinchen¹  and Bal Krishna Koirala^{2*} 

¹Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, Department of Forest and Park Services, Postal box No. 33001, Trongsa, Bhutan

²Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary, Department of Forest and Park Services, Postal box No. 31002, Sarpang, Bhutan

*Corresponding author ✉: bkgelephu@gmail.com

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Abstract

We report the first record of the Tiger shrike, *Lanius tigrinus* Drapiez from Bhumtang District in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. The new geographical distribution of *L. tigrinus* in the Indian subcontinent, specifically in Bhutan, occurring at an elevation greater than 3,000 m is beyond the elevational records of the species in Southeast Asia. This range extension of the Tiger shrike at vast spatial scales, from East Asia to the Eastern Himalayan region of South Asia, provides new scientific insights.

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The Tiger shrike or Thick-billed shrike *Lanius tigrinus* Drapiez is a small passerine bird which belongs to the genus *Lanius* in the shrike family, Laniidae. The species was first described in 1822 by the Belgian naturalist Pierre Auguste Joseph Drapiez (Peterson, 2002). The species is almost exclusively a spring and autumn passage migrant (MacKinnon and Phillips, 2000; Round, 2010) and widely distributed across the Indomalayan and Palearctic realms (BirdLife International, 2016). Some historical records (e.g., Brazil, 1991; Harris and Franklin, 2000; Brazil, 2009) suggest that the population trend of the Tiger shrike appeared to be decreasing and the species is described as rare in China and Russia, relatively common in Korea, and uncommon in Japan. However, the decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid to approach the thresholds for Vulnerable status under the population trend criterion, and hence is listed as Least Concern (BirdLife International, 2016).

Straddling two major biogeographic realms, the Indomalayan and Palearctic, Bhutan, a part of Eastern Himalaya, is one of the biologically richest areas on earth and encompasses an incredible wealth of biodiversity, including a large spectrum of avifauna.

Presently, Bhutan is home to 748 recognized bird species (Lepage, 2022). Of these, at least four species of shrikes viz., Brown shrike *Lanius cristatus* Linnaeus, Bay-backed shrike *Lanius vittatus* (Valenciennes), Long-tailed shrike *Lanius schach* Linnaeus, and Gray-backed shrike *Lanius tephronotus* (Vigors) have been reported so far from Bhutan (Tshulthrim and Wangchuk, 2021). We here report the first record of the Tiger shrike for the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

An opportunistic visual encounter survey was conducted from the first week of June 2020 until 30 August 2020 as part of biodiversity data collection during highland patrolling and *Ophiocordyceps* monitoring duty in one of the remote parts of Wangchuck Centennial National Park in Bumthang District (Fig. 1). On 9 July 2020, the Tiger shrike *Lanius tigrinus* (Fig. 2) was observed and photographed by the first author at an elevation of 3,097 m at the coordinates 27.77011 N, 90.71800 E on the way to Khagtang Army Outpost, Bumthang. Locality data along with habitat parameters were collected. Geolocation of the species was recorded using a global positioning system (Garmin eTrex) and photographs were taken using a Canon EOS 750D digital camera.

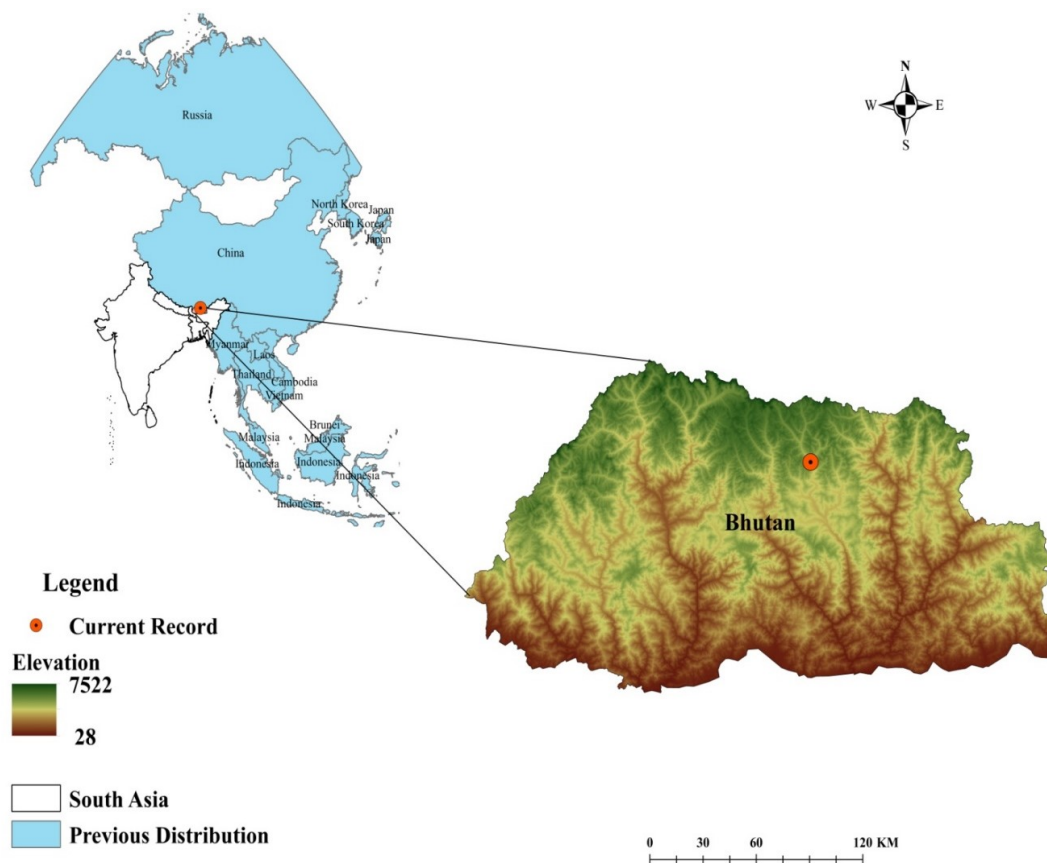


Figure 1: Map showing location of the present record of *Lanius tigrinus* from Bhutan.

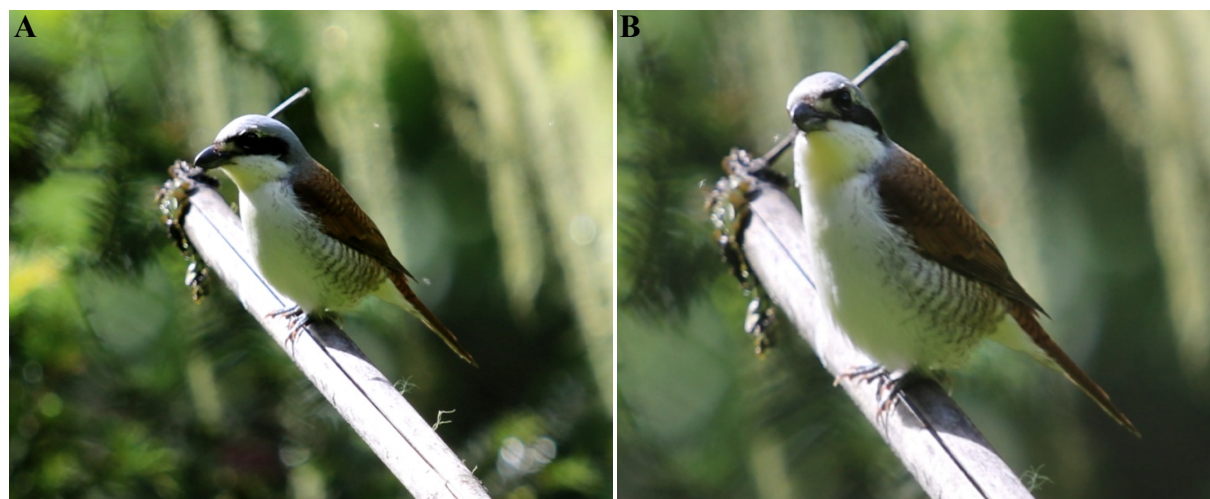


Figure 2: *Lanius tigrinus* observed at Khagtang Army Outpost, Bumthang. Photo by Kado Rinchen.

Following the observation, the published literature, for example by Harris and Franklin (2000), Robson (2008), Grimmett et al. (2011), Clements et al. (2019), and online sources were referred for identification and the current distribution of the observed species. Simultaneously, photographs of the bird were shared with national and international ornithologists via social media and e-mail for correct identification. The observed species was further verified and identified as *Lanius tigrinus* by Tim Inskipp (Ornithologist, expert in birds of the Indian subcontinent) and

subsequently also confirmed by Dr. Sherub, ornithologist at Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Educational Research Institute in Bhutan.

Besides having its distribution in East Asia including Korea, Japan, Cambodia, China, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Brunei (Harris and Franklin, 2000; BirdLife International, 2022), the Tiger shrike is currently known from Bumthang District, Bhutan. The bird is known to

inhabit lowland areas, mainly occurring below 150 m in Russia, 800 m in Japan, and 900 m in China (Harris and Franklin, 2000). It is known to breed in Korea and eastern and northern China to the Russian far east and Japan, wintering throughout much of Southeast Asia south to Indonesia and Borneo (BirdLife International, 2017).

In Bhutan, however, unless otherwise stated, *Lanius tigrinus* (Fig. 2) is recorded from an elevation of 3,097 m. The bird is associated with mountain forest habitat dominated by tree species such as *Larix griffithii*, *Pinus wallichiana* and *Picea spinulosa* along with other broadleaved species viz., *Quercus simicarpifolia*, *Lyonia* sp., *Betula* sp., *Rhododendron* sp., and *Acer* sp. An altitudinal boundary extension demonstrated by the currently observed *L. tigrinus* in Bhutan was much higher than altitudinal records previously reported as 0–1,200 m (BirdLife International, 2022). The first record of *L. tigrinus* from Bhutan provides a total of five confirmed species of shrike in Bhutan. In addition, it also provides vital information on a new distribution range of this species in Bhutan besides East and Southeast Asia.

A major surprise was the paucity of records of *Lanius tigrinus* from the Indian subcontinent including the Eastern Himalayas, even though the region hosts many resident and international birdwatchers. However, the new geographical distribution of *L. tigrinus* in the Indian subcontinent, specifically in Bhutan, occurring at an elevation greater than 3,000 m is beyond the elevational records of the species in Southeast Asian countries. This range extension of *L. tigrinus* at vast spatial scales, from East Asia to the Eastern Himalayan region of South Asia provides new scientific insights and warrants further study on a range shift of this species. Historically, due to the rugged terrains, cold climatic condition, and largely inaccessible landscape, the biological diversity of Eastern Himalaya has remained largely unexplored. However, tremendous effort had been made in recent decades and frequent discovery of new species in the Eastern Himalayas demonstrates a serious need for further exploration in the region.

Through the present study the presence of *L. tigrinus* in Bhutan is confirmed and the country is now home to 749 recognized species of birds. This record highlights the significance of exploring unique biological diversity in the Eastern Himalayas. In recent decades, the frequent discovery of new species and new range extensions in the Eastern Himalayas demonstrated a serious need for further exploration in the region.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicting issues related to this short communication.

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