

Shrike returns annually and learns to appreciate hand-out

"The shrike is back," my wife called out one morning recently.

And while the calendar showed it was Halloween, it also signified this small-winged predator had again returned within a week of its previous arrivals.

Our initial acquaintance with this robin-sized shrike, though, really goes back to a bleak November day four years ago.

At that time, one of the numerous house sparrows that frequent our barn killed itself flying against the hen pen window.

As I stepped from the doorway to toss the carcass into the snow-covered garden, a northern shrike appeared, chasing the sparrows between the out-buildings.

Thinking that the hungry shrike could use a handout, I took the house sparrow that was destined for the compost and put it on the shed roof.

Later that morning, when I saw the shrike fly away with the dead sparrow, it got me thinking.

Maybe, if we had enough of a food supply, we could set up a feeding station for this butcher bird, as it is commonly called.

The problem, however, is once you start something of this nature, you have to continue it.

Knowing that these gray birds with the black masks require at least one victim a day to sustain them, that added up to one heck of a pile of house sparrows. Oh well, it was a thought.

But then, just as I was about ready to abandon the idea, I remembered that northern shrikes prey on other things besides small birds, like mice for example.

Now that opened up a whole new mouse maze of possibilities. As everyone has a periodic mouse problem, why not enlist the help of the neighbors to save and freeze their pests for us?

These, together with the small rodents from our own barn, would be an adequate food source for the wintering northern shrike.

Yet there was another important reason for keeping this butcher bird well fed.

You see, it was one thing to watch this flying predator chase the pesky house sparrows, but quite another to witness its periodic attacks on the chickadees and other small seed-eaters at our feeding station.

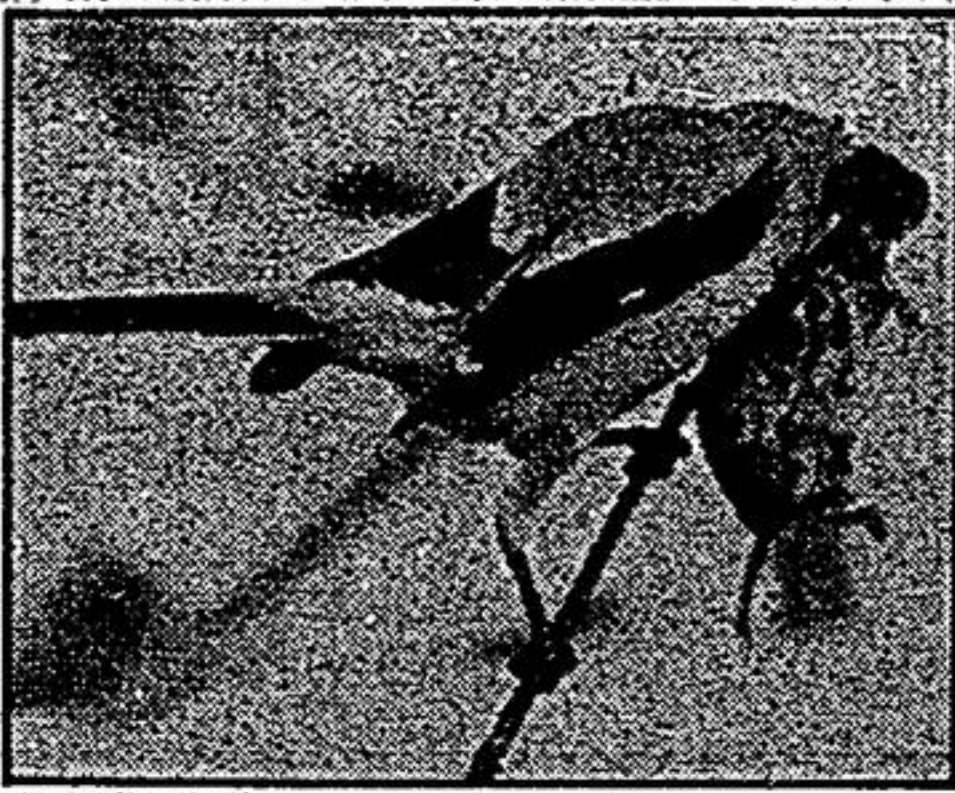
I suppose in some way we were duplicating the old lion tamer's trick, for by keeping their fat cats full and content, they would be less inclined to attack.

Actually it was only a short while until mice were being used instead of the house sparrows and these were hung on the wire fence in place of putting them on the shed roof.

During the next few weeks these furry offerings were gradually moved closer to the house, until they were eventually impaled, as shrikes themselves do, on a sharp twig outside our window.

From such a daily vantage

outdoors
art briggs-jude



NORTHERN SHRIKE
"Hooked on mice"

point over a period of nearly four winters, we have learned a lot about this masked bird that is sometimes referred to as a winged weasel.

It is interesting to note that some of the traits that are attributed to shrikes do not apply to our northern visitor.

A good example is the method in which it carries its prey when airborne.

Unlike some articles we've read, our shrike carries its captured mouse or bird, lands and impales its victim to eat at once or to hang it for future butchering.

At our place this is as common an occurrence as the blue jays trying to steal the woodpecker's peanuts.

There is also no question in

our minds that this is the same returning shrike.

At its first sighting in the yard, we quickly put out a mouse and it flies right over and carries it away.

We also know it prefers mice to birds because when a sparrow is substituted, it may sit there for the whole day before it is taken.

I guess there are some things about this interesting bird we'll never know for sure.

How, for example, does it find its way each year from the edges of the vast treeline lowlands along the shores of Hudson Bay to our neck of the woods in Leeds/Lanark?

Then too, how does it escape the clutches of the sharp-shinned hawk that occasionally hunts in this same valley?

Maybe the keen eyes the shrike uses to spot its prey also keep a sharp lookout for its deadly enemies?

With several hundred frozen mice on hand, we certainly hope so.

PLAY
Santa
BINGO
EVERY
WEDNESDAY
at 7:00 p.m.

To Dec. 19th

From the Centre
Mall Area

\$125.
IN CASH
VOUCHERS
WEEKLY
(5 GAMES WEEKLY)

| CARDS Available From: | TO PLAY Bingo On: |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| November 29th to December 4th | (Purple Card) December 5th |
| December 6th to December 11th | (Blue Card) December 12th |
| December 13th to December 18th | (Gold Card) December 19th |

MALL HOURS
MONDAY - FRIDAY
9:30 - 9:00 P.M.
SATURDAY
9:00 - 6:00 P.M.

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PLACE MALL
5710 MAIN ST. W., STOUFFVILLE

ENTERTAINMENT
MATINEES
(FOR YOUNG & OLD)
SATURDAYS
AT 2 P.M.
(from the Mall area)

- WALLY, the RABBIT**
TOBY, the BEAR
& J.J.
December 8th
- MAGICIAN**
RICHARD MALLET
DECEMBER 15th
- CAROLING with**
LAWNIE WALLACE
SPECIAL
CHRISTMAS EDITION
DECEMBER 22nd

NO ADMISSION CHARGE
"PROVIDE YOUR OWN SEATING"



VISIT
SANTA
SAT., DEC. 1st... After
the Parade until 8 p.m.

***FREE** CANDY,
CANES &
MAGIC BOOKS

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SANTA WITH YOUR
CHILD AVAILABLE
STOUFFVILLE
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JOIN
IN OUR
2nd
BIRTHDAY
PARTY

NOV. 29-30
DEC. 1

MAKE A PURCHASE
IN ANY
PARTICIPATING
STORE (MIN. \$5.00)
...BREAK A
BALLOON AND
RECEIVE THE
PERCENTAGE
REVEALED ON THE
COUPON INSIDE

SAVE AT LEAST
10%
AND UP TO
50%

(Some store participator product restrictions may apply)

OPEN SATURDAYS
UNTIL 9 P.M.
DEC. 1, 8, 15, & 23

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Ho, Ho, Ho

Breakfast
With
Santa

SATURDAY,
DECEMBER 8th
Kellington's Restaurant
Come join J.J., Toby the Bear
& Wally the Rabbit to meet,
greet and welcome Santa to
The Stouffville Place Mall.

1st Sitting
9:30 a.m.
2nd Sitting
10:30 a.m.

PANCAKES
& **MILK WILL BE SERVED**
Reserve Advance Tickets
from any Stouffville Place Mall
store. Admission to Breakfast
A New Teddy Bear which
will be donated to less
fortunate children
for Christmas.

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BEAR'S
PICNIC
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PLACE MALL
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Fri. & Sat. 11 a.m. - Midnight