SHORT COMMUNICATION

Flocks of the Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) on migration

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Abstract: Great Grey Shrikes are usually territorial all the year round. However, flocks of up to 15 individuals have been observed on migration in Poland recently. On 3rd November 2001 in the morning, I observed a flock of 110 Great Grey Shrikes near ponds in Zimno (E Poland).

Key words: flocking, migration, E Poland, *Lanius excubitor*

The Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*), like other European Shrikes (*Lanius* sp.), shows exclusive territorialism throughout the year, which is especially stressed during the breeding period. During the migration season, there are usually some territorial individuals, or a few scattered foraging birds. However, there are some interesting observations from southeastern Poland, where small groups of 6–8 (up to 15) Great Grey Shrikes have been recorded in spring. On 7th April 1998 in Rabinówka (near Tomaszów Lubelski, 50º26’N, 23º22’E) a flock of more than 15 Great Grey Shrikes were noticed (pers. comm., R. CYMBALA). These birds perched on a willow (*Salix* sp.) at the edge of forest, about 300 m from the nearest buildings. During the observation they flushed and flew ca. 100 m to sit on another tree. These birds were not feeding, which suggests that the flock was on migration. On 12th March 2001, eight Great Grey Shrikes were observed on bushes near the valley of the river in Czarna Sędziszowska (50º08’N, 21º46’E). Additionally, on 24th March of the same year, a flock of Great Grey Shrikes was also seen in Majdan Królewski (near Rzeszów, 50º22’N, 21º45’E; pers. comm., M. FILIPEK). Both flocks were observed late in the afternoon, which suggests that they were roosting before night. Another interesting observation was on 3rd November 2001 in the morning near ponds in Zimno, where I observed a flock of 110 Great Grey Shrikes. The birds were flying over willow bushes growing near the riverbed and after several minutes they hid behind the wil-
low thickets in the valley of the river Huczwa (50°30’N 23°44’E). Taking into consideration the lateness of the day I suppose that they were roosting in the thickets near ponds and continued their migration the following morning. On both the previous and the following day, I did not notice any Great Grey Shrikes in that area, so this was a flock on migration. These observations suggest that during the migration season the usually solitary and exclusively territorial Great Grey Shrikes may flock in large numbers. It is possible that prey abundance in the vicinity of a garbage tip could result in flocking of Great Grey Shrikes, causing the unusual social behaviour and roosting, perhaps for safety.

To date there have been no records of migrating flocks of Great Grey Shrikes in Poland (Tomiałoic & Stawarczyk 2003) and perhaps in Europe, too. The observed flock of 110 individuals is probably one of the largest aggregations of this species noticed on the continent (Cramp 1985).

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REFERENCES
