

# Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) predation on a Pacific Gopher Snake (*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*)

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The Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) is best known for its predatory behavior on a variety of vertebrate and invertebrate species, including amphibians and reptiles. It typically impales its prey on sharp objects, such as barbed wire, thorns, and branches. Herein I report Loggerhead Shrike predatory behavior on a Pacific Gopher Snake (*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*).

In a previous review (Clark 2011) the Pacific Gopher Snake was not reported in the literature as a prey item, although likely to be a common occurrence. My observation may be the first published record. If the readership knows of a reference detailing the predation of a Pacific Gopher Snake by the Loggerhead Shrike, please send me an email, [hclark@harveyecology.com](mailto:hclark@harveyecology.com).

On the evening of 23 September 2011, I was heading eastbound on State Route 58 in San Luis Obispo County, California. At 1820 I observed a Loggerhead Shrike carrying what looked like a ribbon in its beak as it flew across the road and onto the shoulder. I turned around and drove back to where I saw the bird perched on the fence about 50 feet ahead of me (Figure 1). The bird flew to the shoulder of the highway and made a few display flaps with its wings (Figures 2 and 3). I saw what looked like a snake in front of it. After a few moments the shrike flew off; I exited my vehicle and approached the snake. I identified it as a juvenile Pacific Gopher Snake (Figures 4 and 5). Although still alive, it was in a weakened condition, with head trauma (Figure 6). When I picked it up it did not struggle. It weighed 13 g (0.46 oz) and measured 35.5 cm (14 inches) long. I left the snake where I found it in hopes that the shrike would return for its meal. Ambient temperature: 31°C (88°F); no breeze; coordinates of observation: UTM 10S 0772238 3916148; elevation 613 m (2010 ft).

## Literature Cited

Clark, H. O., Jr. 2011. Reptiles and Amphibians as Loggerhead Shrike Prey. *Sonoran Herpetologist* 24(3):20-21.



Figure 1. Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) perched on a barbed wire fence. Photo by Howard Clark.



Figures 2 and 3. Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) attack displays. Photos by Howard Clark.

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Figure 4. Pacific Gopher Snake (*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*) as seen when first approached by the author. Photo by Howard Clark.



Figure 5. Pacific Gopher Snake (*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*) dorsal surface after handling by author. Photo by Howard Clark.



Figure 6. Close up of head, showing trauma on the right side of head with bloodied eye. Photo by Howard Clark.

## Sonoran Herpetologist Natural History Observations

The Tucson Herpetological Society invites your contributions to our Natural History Notes section. We are particularly interested in photographs and descriptions of amphibians and reptiles involved in noteworthy or unusual behaviors in the field. Notes

can feature information such as diet, predation, community structure, interspecific behavior, or unusual locations or habitat use. Please submit your observations to Howard Clark, [editor.sonoran.berp@gmail.com](mailto:editor.sonoran.berp@gmail.com). Submissions should be brief and in electronic form.