



Type specimens and taxonomic identity of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* Gavrilenko, 1928 (Aves: Laniidae)^{1,2}

Svetlana Ů. Tajkova

Zoological Museum, National Museum of Natural History, National Ukrainian Academy of Sciences,
st. B. Khmelnytsky 15, Kyiv 01601, Ukraine; e-mail: tajkova@izan.kiev.ua.

ABSTRACT. Type specimens of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* Gavrilenko were located in the collections of the V. N. Karazin Museum of Natural History, Kharkiv National University, Ukraine. Their restudy showed that *L. e. stepensis* is intermediate in morphological characters between *L. e. homeyeri* and *L. e. excubitor*.

KEY WORDS. Laniidae, *Lanius excubitor stepensis*, Gavrilenko, wing plumage.

INTRODUCTION

Birds are traditionally considered one of the taxonomically best studied groups of animals. However, the complexes of closely related species and subspecies still represent a challenge for taxonomy. The great grey shrike complex (species, subspecies, color forms and geographical races of *Lanius excubitor* L., 1758) is one of such problematic cases (Poelstra 2010).

The aim of this paper is to identify type specimens of the Steppe Grey Shrike, *Lanius excubitor stepensis* Gavrilenko, 1928, and to discuss the taxonomic status of this form.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In studied specimens in the collections of the V. N. Karazin Museum of Natural History, Kharkiv National University, Kharkiv, Ukraine (MNKGNU), and the Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia (ZISP). The terminology of plumage characters and morphometry follow Koblik & Mosalov (2006).

The length of the first primaries was measured from the carpal bend to their tips. White wing patches on the primaries and secondaries were measured from the carpal bend of the wing to the distal border of each white patch. In addition, the visible part (i.e. that not covered with feathers) of white patches on the primaries, secondaries and rectrices was

1 urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:807B1839-A6FA-42CD-A752-59E9FE64CD44

2 The text is transliterated from the Cyrillic to the Latin script using the ISO 9:1995 standards (ISO 1995, GOST 2000) throughout this paper. – Ed.

drawn for each of the collection specimens (Figs. 1-2). All measurements were taken by a digital caliper.

Statistical data were processed using the software packages MS Excel 2000, StatSoft, inc. and Statistika 7.0.

NIKOLAJ GAVRILENKO

Short biography

Nikolaj Ivanovič Gavrilenko (5 August 1889 – 14 January 1971) was a well-known zoologist, who authored papers on ornithology, herpetology and mammalogy. In 1916-1923 he was the Deputy Director of the Poltava Regional Museum, and in 1923-1935 he headed the Natural History Department of the Museum. His personal collection of bird skins (currently housed in the MNKGNU) includes more than 5,000 specimens, including 91 specimens of grey shrikes (Devátko 2009).

During his lifetime, Gavrilenko has been repeatedly harassed by the authorities. In 1935-1940 he was imprisoned for political reasons (rehabilitated in 1989; posthumously). During the World War II, when the territory of Ukraine (the city of Poltava, in particular) was occupied by German Nazi troops, Gavrilenko managed to continue working in the the Poltava Museum of Nature (under Nazi administration). Due to this employment Gavrilenko was later, under Soviet regime, considered a politically untrustworthy person, which caused certain social pressure on him. For example, he was suspected to have misappropriated a number of specimens from the Poltava Museum before it was burned to the ground in 1943 and its collections were completely lost, because he was known to have a large personal bird collection and because he had an ultimate access to the collections of the Museum. However, a special investigation has not revealed any museum specimens (listed in the pre-war catalogue of the Museum) in Gavrilenko's private collection (Samorodov & Kigim 2009). In 1969, Gavrilenko was persuaded to donate his collection to the MNKGNU.

It is also worth mentioning that the author's surname was spelled in Latin script in different papers either as "Gawrilenko" or as "Gavrilenko". The latter spelling follows the ISO 9:1995 standards (ISO 1995, GOST 2000), is commonly used in current literature (e.g. Dickinson 2003, Stepan'ân 2003, Koblik et al. 2006) and I therefore use it here.

Gavrilenko's labeling

Some features of the labeling of Gavrilenko's specimens are discussed below in detail, because they should be taken into account while working with his collection.

1. Gavrilenko preferred to follow the so-called Old Style (O.S.), i.e. the Julian calendar used in Russia until 1918. Despite the fact that the Gregorian calendar (the so-called New Style, N.S.) was adopted in the USSR at the time of the publication of the Gavrilenko's papers (including the original description of *L. e. stepensis*: Gavrilenko 1928), he continued to use the "Old Style" for the collection dates: however, often without any special remarks. Correspondingly, the dates written on his labels and provided in the publications may differ by 13 days (the difference between the Gregorian

and Julian calendars in the 20th century; Mlíkovský 2010). Usually, the ‘Old Style’ data are mentioned in brackets on the labels (Figs. 3-10), but just one date is given in the publication.

2. The original Gavrilenko’s labels do not bear the collector’s name. This applies to almost all specimens in his collection. Gavrilenko explained this approach by a kind of “personal considerations” (Grubant 2009). However, when his collection was transferred to the MNKGNU, all his labels stamped “ex coll. Gavrilenko N.I.” (Grubant 2009).
3. As mentioned above, soon after the World War II Gavrilenko faced charges of misappropriating the bird collection of the Poltava Regional Museum, but this was not confirmed (Samorodov & Kigim 2009). However, one can imagine (knowing Gavrilenko’s fondness for birds and bird collections) that he indeed managed to save at least a part of the Poltava collection. If this hypothetical event took place, then Gavrilenko might have somewhat changed (rewrote) the labels to avoid extra charges for even unintended misappropriation (apart from those for his pre-war imprisonment and for his employment under the Nazi regime).

The putative type specimens of the taxa described by Gavrilenko before the World War II were supposedly stored in the Poltava Regional Museum, so, according to the official version, they were conflagrated in 1943 (if the whole collection was burned). Because most of the scientific activity of Gavrilenko was done prior to the publication of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (first edition 1961), one can imagine that Gavrilenko replaced lost types with newly collected specimens, which he labeled them as the “types”. This is even more probable in the cases, when the type specimens were not clearly defined in original descriptions (e.g. in the description of *L. e. stepensis*).

These hypothetical considerations result from the sophisticated labeling and the incongruence between the labels and the equally sophisticated original description of *Lanius excubitor stepensis*. I considered these hypotheses when I tried to understand the data presented by Gavrilenko, and when I identified the type series and designated the lectotype of *L. e. stepensis*.

DESCRIPTION OF LANIUS EXCUBITOR STEPENSIS

The original description of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* was published by Gavrilenko (1928) in Russian with an English summary. First, he described differences between *L. excubitor homeyeri* and the unnamed ‘new form’. The latter is called *Lanius excubitor stepensis* in the Russian text (p. 272) and in the English abstract (p. 275; see below). The original description of *L. e. stepensis* was not appropriately structured; it does not contain clear diagnosis and definition of the type series (although Gavrilenko did this in some of his other papers). The wording of the description indicates that Gavrilenko was not sure about the status and diagnostic characters of this form; this probably caused the chaotic nature of the description.

Gavrilenko (1928: 271) provided the following description of *L. e. stepensis* (my translation): “This shrike form differs from *L. ex. homeyeri* in having darker upperparts, narrower apical white spots on the secondaries and less white on the forehead and in super-

cilum. Lore continuously black. White wing patch is of the same size as in *L. e. homeyeri*. Its size [= length] on the primaries varies between 19 and 21 mm. Two outermost pairs of rectrices are pure white, only a narrow dark stripe stretches along the edge of the inner vane of the second pair on the rectrices. The white base of the middle pair of the rectrices is well developed, up to 28-30 mm long". Gavrilenko added that the representatives of *L. e. stepensis* should not be confused with very pale-colored *L. ex. excubitor*, from which they differ in having darker upperparts and a large white wing patch".

In addition, Gavrilenko (1928: 272, 275) provided a Latin description of *L. e. stepensis*, as follows: "Lanius Lanii homeyeri similis, sed supra multo obscurior et cum albis summis maculis in remigibus secundariis minoribus. Speculum aequale *L. homeyeri*. Albo colore frontis et supercilii leniore."

Overall, Gavrilenko (1928) directly or indirectly referred to five specimens in the description of *L. e. stepensis*. A list of these specimens, conventionally numbered as G28:1-5, is given below (sex of the birds was never indicated, which is not repeated below):

- G28:1 A specimen, which originally attracted author's attention in 1918 (i.e. was collected in 1918 or earlier). Gavrilenko said that it has a large white wing patch and white outer tail feathers, but did not specify its locality of origin.
- G28:2 A "summer" specimen, collected on 31 July 1923 (Old Style), "collected in a virgin shrub steppe at the 'Ukrainian line' (south of Konstantinograd [=Krasnodar, Kharkiv's'ka oblast', Ukraine])". Gavrilenko said "I have it in my hands", what means that the specimen was deposited either in the Gavrilenko's private collection or in the collection of the Poltava Regional Museum.
- G28:3 A specimen with the same data as for G28:2, but collected on 1 August 1923 (Old Style).
- G28:4 A specimen in the ZISP collection, collected on 20 November (no year given) "on the banks of Laba River", i.e. in Krasnodarsky krai or in the Republic of Adygea.
- G28:5 A specimen in the ZISP collection, collected on 19 November 1891 "from Simonet, vicinity of Batum", i.e. now Batumi, Adjara Republic, Georgia.

Gavrilenko (1928) gave measurements of five specimens, but did not indicate whether these were the briefly mentioned five specimens listed above (stored in different museums at the time of description) or other unspecified specimens. Moreover, Gavrilenko (1928) stated that in addition to the 'summer' specimens (G28:2, G28:3) there were 'in the hands of the author' also 'autumnal' and 'spring' specimens. Neither the number of these specimens, nor their collection localities were specified. However, there are five specimens in the MNKKNU (MNKKNU 13008, 12943, 12957, 12973 and 12984) bearing labels with measurements in Gavrilenko's handwritings.

SPECIMENS

***Lanius excubitor stepensis* in the Gavrilenko's collection**

All specimens labeled '*Lanius excubitor stepensis*' by Gavrilenko's hand are listed below with corresponding inventory numbers of the MNKKNU. Text written on the recto side of each label is rewritten here (transliterated if the original is in Cyrillic script); dates and

localities are interpreted [in brackets]. The recto sides of labels include measurements, which are given here in English (all are in mm). See Figs. 3-10 for the photos of each label.

MNKKNU 13008

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 3): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♂, 6 XII (23 XI) 921 [= 6 December 1921; New Style], Typus, srub Sklifasovskoj bliz Ternovšiny-Bližnej Poltavskij uезд, [= Ternovshina village, Poltava region, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine]. Verso – bill from cranium 20; from naris 12.9; wing 116; tail 119; tarsus 27.6. Wing formula 2<3<4>5; 6>2>7.

REMARKS: Although Gavrilenko designated this specimen as the "typus", the date on the label does not match the data in the original description of *Lanius excubitor stepensis*, but corresponds with the "autumn" group, if the date is converted to the "Old Style". The locality is close to the localities mentioned for the specimens G28:1 and G28:2. The measurements are within the limits given in the original description.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 1a): According to my measurements, the white patch on the primaries is shorter than the first primary. Maximum length of the patch on the primaries = 71.4 mm; on the secondaries = 64.4 mm; length of the first primary = 71.6 mm.

MNKKNU 12943

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 4): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♂, 19 (6) II 924 [= 19 February 1924; New Style], Svinkovka – Poltavs'kij uезд" [= Svinkovka village, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine]. Verso – bill from cranium 18.9; from naris 12.9; wing 116.5; tail 120; tarsus 27. Wing formula 2<3>4>5, 6>2>7.

REMARKS: The year of the collection fits the original description of *L. e. stepensis*.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 1b): According to my measurements, the white patch on the primaries is shorter than the first primary. Maximum on the primaries = 70.8 mm; on the secondaries = 62.4 mm; length of the first primary = 72.9 mm.

MNKKNU 12957

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 5): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♀, 14 (1) VIII 912 [= 14 August 1912; New Style], Ukrainskâ Liniâ k ûgu ot Konstantinograda, Poltavski ud. [= 'Ukrainian Line', Krasnodar region, Kharkivs'ka oblast', Ukraine]. Verso – bill from the skull 20.5; from naris 13.4; U 115.2; C 116; T 27.5. Wing formula 2<3edva<4>5; 6>2>7.

REMARKS: This specimen largely agrees with the specimen G28:3, but differs in the year of collection.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 1c): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is shorter than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 69.9 mm; on the secondaries = 54.9 mm; length of the first primary = 72.0 mm.

MNKKNU 12965

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 6): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♂, Paratypus, 10 I 929 (28 XII 928) [= 10 January 1929; New Style], Pisarevšina – Zen'kovskij uезд" [= Pisarevshina village, Dikan'sky region, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine].

REMARKS: Although Gavrilenko designated this specimen as the "paratype", the New Style date on the label does not match the dates in the original description of *L. e. stepensis*. However, if the Old Style date is considered, the year fits the original description of *L. e. stepensis*.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 1d): According to my measurements, the white patch on the primaries is somewhat longer than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 71.8 mm; on the secondaries = 58.8 mm; length of the first primary = 71.5 mm.

MNKKNU 12973

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 7): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♀, 6 XII (23 XI) 923 [= 6 December 1923; New Style], Gorûnovè Ozero – Poltavskij uезд" [= Goryunove Lake, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine]. Verso – bill from the skull 18.6; from naris 12.3; U. 113.2; C. 112.4; T. 25.1. Wing formula 2<3<4>5, 6>2>7.

REMARKS: This may be one of the "autumnal" specimens mentioned by Gavrilenko in the original description of *L. e. stepensis*, but only if the Old Style date is considered.

3 The Russian word "edva" means "barely" in English.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 1e): According to my measurements, the white patch on the primaries is larger than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 72.9 mm; on the secondaries = 59.5 mm; length of the first primary = 66.9 mm.

MNKKNU 12984

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 8): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♂, 8 III (24 II) 916 [= 8 March 1916; New Style], Svinkovka – Poltavskij uезд" [= Svinkovka, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine]. Verso – bill from the skull 19.4; from naris 13.1; U. 116.6; C. 121.2; T. 19.1. Wing formula 2<3<4>5; 6>2>7.

REMARKS: This may be one of the "spring" specimens mentioned by Gavrilenko in the original description of *L. e. stepensis*, but only if the New Style date is considered.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 1f): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is longer than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 74.1 mm; on the secondaries = 63.2; length of the first primary = 71.4 mm.

MNKKNU 12939

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 9): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♂, 30 (17) XI 929 [= 30 November 1929; New Style], Kamenka – Poltavskij uезд" [= Kamenka, Dikan'sky region, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine].

REMARKS: The year of the collection does not fit the original description of *L. ex. stepensis*.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 2a): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is longer than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 73.9 mm; on the secondaries = 62.0 mm; length of the first primary = 71.9 mm.

MNKKNU 13009

LABEL (Gavrilenko's handwriting; Fig. 10): Recto – "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*, ♂, 2 XI (21 X) 953 [= 2 November 1953; New Style], Pobyvanki – Poltavskij uезд" [= Tahtaulovo village, khutor Pobyvanovka, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine. Verso – L. 260; E. 360; P. 70 gr. "Stomach full of insect remnants, 6 of them are *Gryllulus* specimens" (my translation).

REMARKS: The year of the collection does not fit the original description of *Lanius excubitor stepensis*.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 2b): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is longer than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 75.6 mm; on the secondaries = 63.9 mm; length of the first primary = 69.9 mm.

Specimens of *Lanius excubitor>stepensis* in Gavrilenko's collection

There is a series of five specimens labeled by Gavrilenko as "*Lanius excubitor>stepensis*" in the collection of the MNKKNU. These specimens were thus recognized by Gavrilenko as intermediates between the nominotypical *excubitor* and his new *stepensis*. The labeling of these specimens supports the idea that Gavrilenko was not sure as to the limits and status of the 'form' that he described as a subspecies. These specimens certainly do not form part of the type series of *L. e. stepensis* and the label data are thus given here in brief. All measurements written on the verso side were written in Gavrilenko's hand.

MNKKNU 12966

LABEL: ♂, collected on 20 January 1929 (New Style) at Dikan'ka village, Dikan'sky region, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 2c): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is longer than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 73.2 mm; on the secondaries = 58.9 mm; length of the first primary = 71.6 mm.

MNKKNU 12969

LABEL: ♂, collected on 28 March 1923 at Âkovci village, Poltava region, Poltavs'ka oblast', Ukraine, Verso – bill from the skull 22,5; from the naris 14,4; U. 117,5; C. 121,5; T.27,5. Wing formula 2<3<4>5; 6>2>7.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 2d): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is shorter than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 70.8 mm; on the secondaries = 62.4 mm; length of the first primary = 72.9 mm.

MNKKNU 12976

LABEL: ♂, collected on 25 December 1930 (New Style) at Sudnevka village, Krasnodar region, Poltav's'ka oblast', Ukraine.

MORPHOLOGY: According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is longer than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 71.5 mm; on the secondaries = 61.3 mm; length of the first primary = 75.1 mm.

MNKKNU 12978

LABEL: ♂, collected on 2 December 1915 at Šolud'ki village, Poltava region, Poltav's'ka oblast', Ukraine. Verso – bill from the skull 19; from the naris 13,6; U. 115,6; C. 120; T.27,5. Wing formula $2<3<4>5; 6>2>7$.

MORPHOLOGY: According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is shorter just somewhat longer than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 69.8 mm; on the secondaries = 56.9 mm; length of the first primary = 69.1 mm.

MNKKNU 12983

LABEL: ♂, collected on 15 April 1922 (New Style) at Kovan'kivka village, Poltava region, Poltav's'ka oblast', Ukraine. Verso – bill from the skull 19,6; from the naris 12; U. 111,2; C. 114,4; T.27,1. Wing formula $2<3=4>5; 2 \neq 6$.

MORPHOLOGY: According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is shorter than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 69.0 mm; on the secondaries = 57.2 mm; length of the first primary = 70.4 mm.

ZISP specimens probably studied by Gavrilenko

There are two specimens in the collection of ZISP, which completely fit the data provided by Gavrilenko for specimens G28:4 and G28:5. Gavrilenko (1928) suggested that these specimens represent *L. x. stepensis* rather than *L. ex. excubitor*. Thus, he only conditionally recognized them as *stepensis*, which means that they do not belong in the type series of *L. e. stepensis*.

ZISP 23622

LABEL: ♂, collected on 20 November (Old or New Style; year not given) at the Laba River (locality not defined more precisely; probably Krasnodarsky krai or Republic of Adygea), North Caucasus, Russia. From the M.A.Menzbir's collection.

REMARKS: This specimen is almost certainly the specimen G28:4.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 2e): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is shorter than the first primary. Maximum length on the primaries = 68.8 mm; on the secondaries = 63.2 mm; length of the first primary = 69.9 mm.

ZISP 23627

LABEL: Unsexed, collected on 19 November 1891 (New Style) at Batumi, Adjara Republic, Georgia. From the M.A.Menzbir's collection.

REMARKS. This specimen is almost certainly the specimen listed above as G28:5.

MORPHOLOGY (Fig. 2f): According to my measurements, the white wing patch on the primaries is shorter than the first primary. Maximum on the primaries = 69.2 mm; on the secondaries = 51.8 mm; length of the first primary = 71.7 mm.

THE TYPE SERIES

Gavrilenko has written the original description of *L. e. stepensis* in a rather complicated and sophisticated manner. He did not properly define the type series, and also his description does not adequately shed light on the morphological limits of *stepensis*. The designation of the type series is necessary for the stability of the nomenclature and further clarification of the taxonomic status of *Lanius excubitor stepensis*. The Article 72.4.1.1 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999) states: "For a nominal species or subspecies established before 2000, any evidence, published or unpublished, may be taken into account to determine what specimens constitute the type series". This is applicable to *L. e. stepensis*, for which no data on the type series were given in the original description. However, the MNKGNU houses a series of specimens labelled personally by Gavrilenko with his hand. The labels somewhat contradict the data sparsely mentioned in the original description, but we are in a position to take into account the incoherent style of the description and the peculiarities of Gavrilenko's biography. The ZISP specimens, although quite probably studied by Gavrilenko, were not labeled by him as *stepensis* and their status was not clearly stated in the original description. Moreover, these specimens originate from the Caucasian region, which is distant from east-central Ukraine, from which the series labeled by Gavrilenko as *stepensis* originated. These specimens thus cannot be part of the type series of *L. e. stepensis*.

Some specimens labelled by Gavrilenko as "*Lanius excubitor stepensis*" were collected (judging from the label dates) after the original description (i.e. 1928). Although it cannot be excluded that they were collected earlier, but were re-labelled (due to personal considerations of Gavrilenko), I prefer not to include them in the type series, because there is no evidence that the original description was not based on them. Therefore I propose to include in the type series (i.e. to recognize as syntypes) of *L. e. stepensis* only specimens satisfying the following requirements: (a) labelled personally by Gavrilenko as *stepensis*, and (b) having collection dates (inscribed on labels) earlier and or from the year of original description. Thus, I recognize the following specimens as the syntypes of *L. e. stepensis*: MNKGNU 13008, 12943, 12957, 12973 and 12984.

MORPHOMETRY

The original description of *L. e. stepensis* does not include any distinct characters distinguishing *stepensis* from the other known forms of grey shrikes. However, Gavrilenko discussed the morphological characteristics of the described 'new form' in various parts of the description and also provided some measurements on the labels. Nevertheless, the measurements of only two specimens (MNKGNU 13008 and 12943) fit the limits described in the original description of *L. e. stepensis*. Below, I provide new measurements of the wing white patches on primaries and secondaries (Tabs. 1-2) and of the length of the first primary (Tab. 3) of the grey shrikes from the Gavrilenko's collection.

Tab. 1. Maximum length (mm) of the white patch on the primaries (males, autumn-winter): range, mean \pm standard error (M \pm m), standard deviation (σ), coefficient of variation (CV).

Form	N	Range	M \pm m	σ	CV
<i>Lanius excubitor stepensis</i>	5	70.8-75.6	72.7 \pm 0.89	2.00	3.99
<i>Lanius excubitor homeyeri</i>	4	71.9-74.4	73.5 \pm 0.57	1.13	1.29
<i>Lanius excubitor excubitor</i>	18	60.9-70.6	65.2 \pm 0.61	2.58	6.65
<i>Lanius excubitor>stepensis</i>	3	69.8-73.2	71.5 \pm 0.98	1.70	2.89

Tab. 2. Maximum length (mm) of the white patch on the secondaries (males, autumn-winter): range, mean \pm standard error (M \pm m), standard deviation (σ), coefficient of variation (CV).

Form	N	Range	M \pm m	σ	CV
<i>Lanius excubitor stepensis</i>	5	58.4-64.4	62.3 \pm 0.98	2.20	4.83
<i>Lanius excubitor homeyeri</i>	4	59.3-68.4	63.9 \pm 1.97	3.94	15.52
<i>Lanius excubitor excubitor</i>	10	43.4-61.2	51.7 \pm 1.69	5.35	28.65
<i>Lanius excubitor>stepensis</i>	3	56.9-61.3	59.0 \pm 1.27	2.20	4.85

Tab. 3. Length (mm) of the first primaries (males, autumn-winter): range, mean \pm standard error (M \pm m), standard deviation (σ), coefficient of variation (CV).

Form	N	Range	M \pm m	σ	CV
<i>Lanius excubitor stepensis</i>	5	69.9-72.9	71.6 \pm 0.48	1.08	1.17
<i>Lanius excubitor homeyeri</i>	4	70.9-71.6	71.1 \pm 0.17	0.33	0.11
<i>Lanius excubitor excubitor</i>	18	64.7-73.6	70.5 \pm 0.51	2.16	4.67
<i>Lanius excubitor>stepensis</i>	3	69.1-75.1	71.9 \pm 1.74	3.01	9.08

TAXONOMIC ASSESSMENT

Lanius excubitor stepensis Gavrilenko was considered a synonym of *L. e. homeyeri* Cabanis, 1873 (Dement'ev 1937, 1954, Vaurie 1959, Stepanân 2003, Panov 2008), as a synonym of *L. e. excubitor* (Stepanân 1990) or as a valid subspecies (Šarleman' 1938).

Specimens labeled by Gavrilenko as “*Lanius excubitor stepensis*” (i.e. syntypes) exhibit characters that link *L. e. stepensis* with both the geographically close forms called in literature *L. e. homeyeri* and *L. e. excubitor*. The characters shared with *L. e. homeyeri* are (1) presence of two well-developed patches on primaries and secondaries, (2) presence of the white patch on the outer tail feathers, and (3) smaller wing length. The characters shared with *L. e. excubitor* are (1) dark-grey mantle, and (2) dark rump.

The form *L. e. stepensis* is thus morphologically intermediate between *L. e. homeyeri* and *L. e. excubitor*. These forms are genetically close to each other (Olsson et al. 2010, Poelstra 2010). The taxonomic status of *L. e. stepensis* thus requires a confirmation using molecular data.

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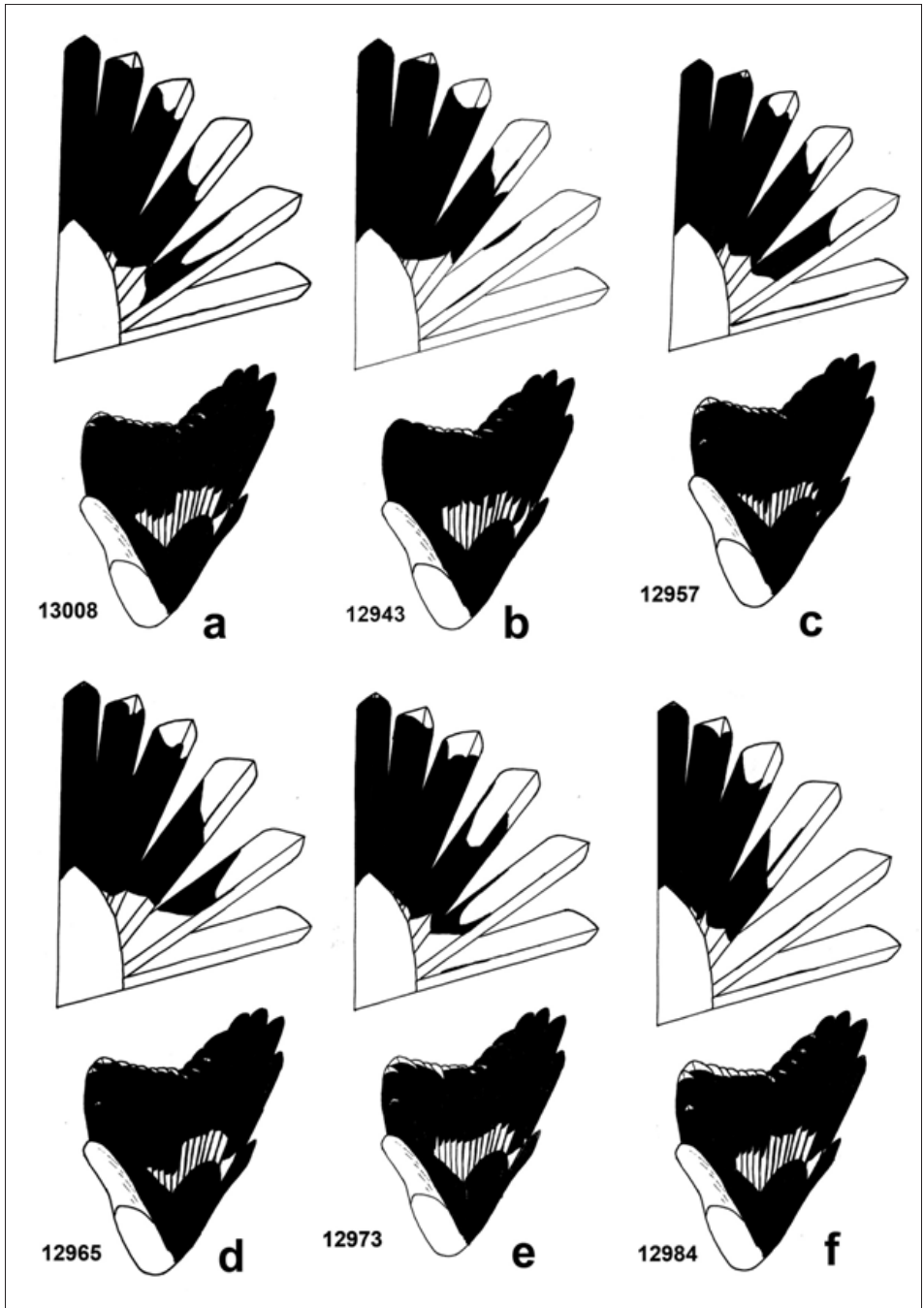


Fig.1. Wing plumage of the specimens of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* in the Gawrilenko's collection (MNKKNNU). The numbers are inventory numbers in the MNKKNNU.

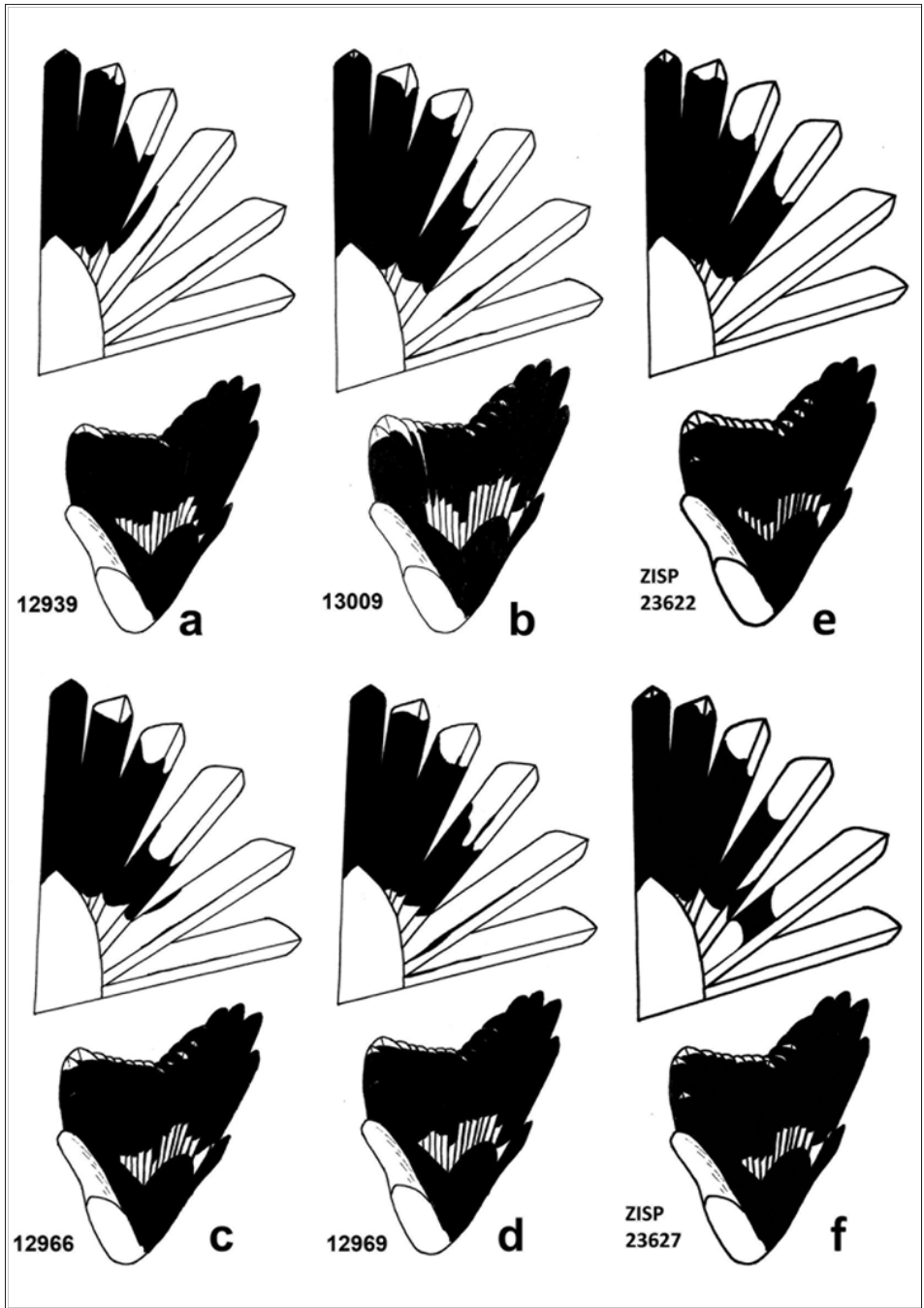


Fig.2. Wing plumage of the specimens of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* in the Gawrilenko's collection (MNKGNU) and in ZISP collection. Unlabeled numbers are inventory numbers in the MNKGNU.

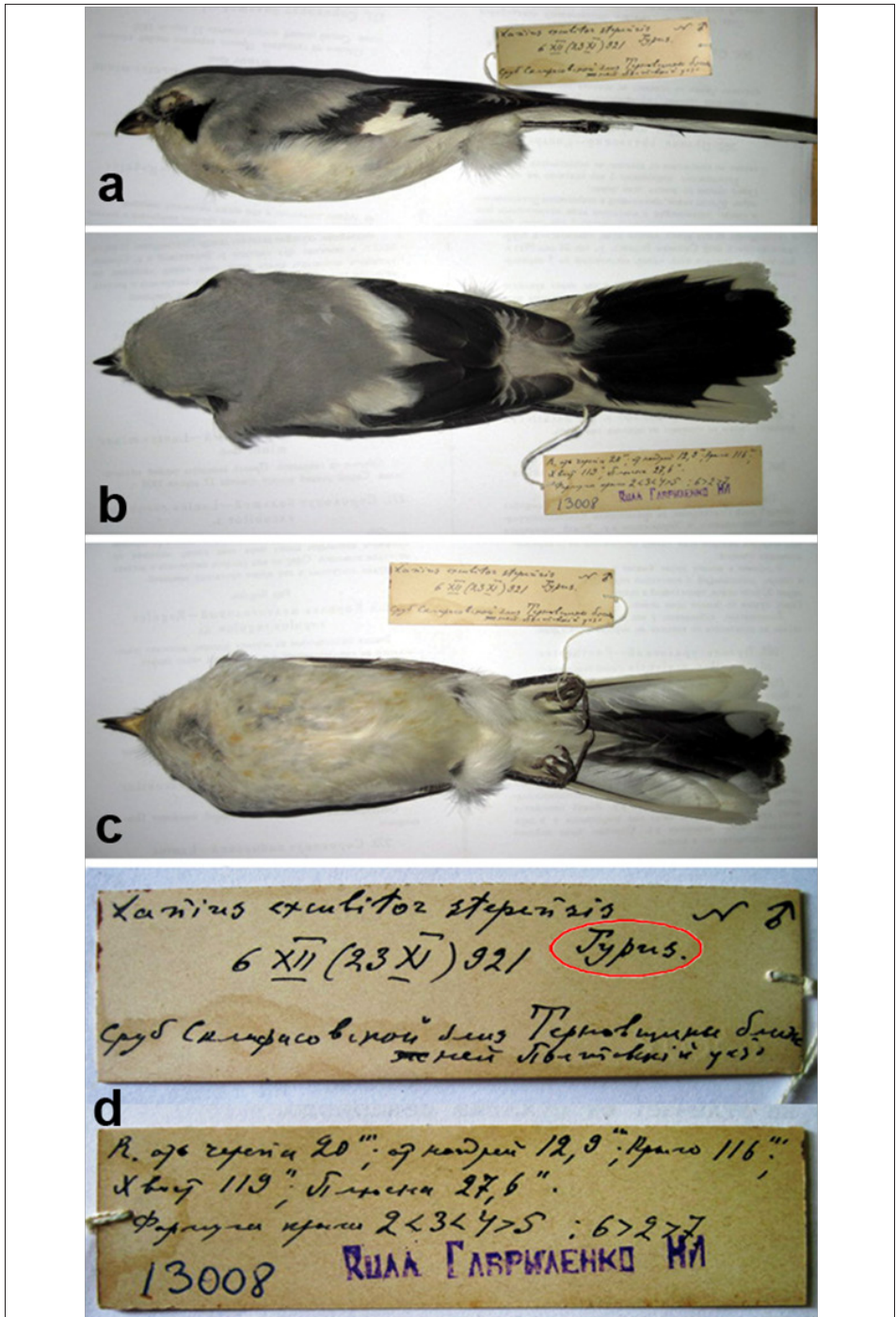


Fig. 3. Syntype of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKGNU 13008): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko’s handwriting; the word “Typus” is marked in red.

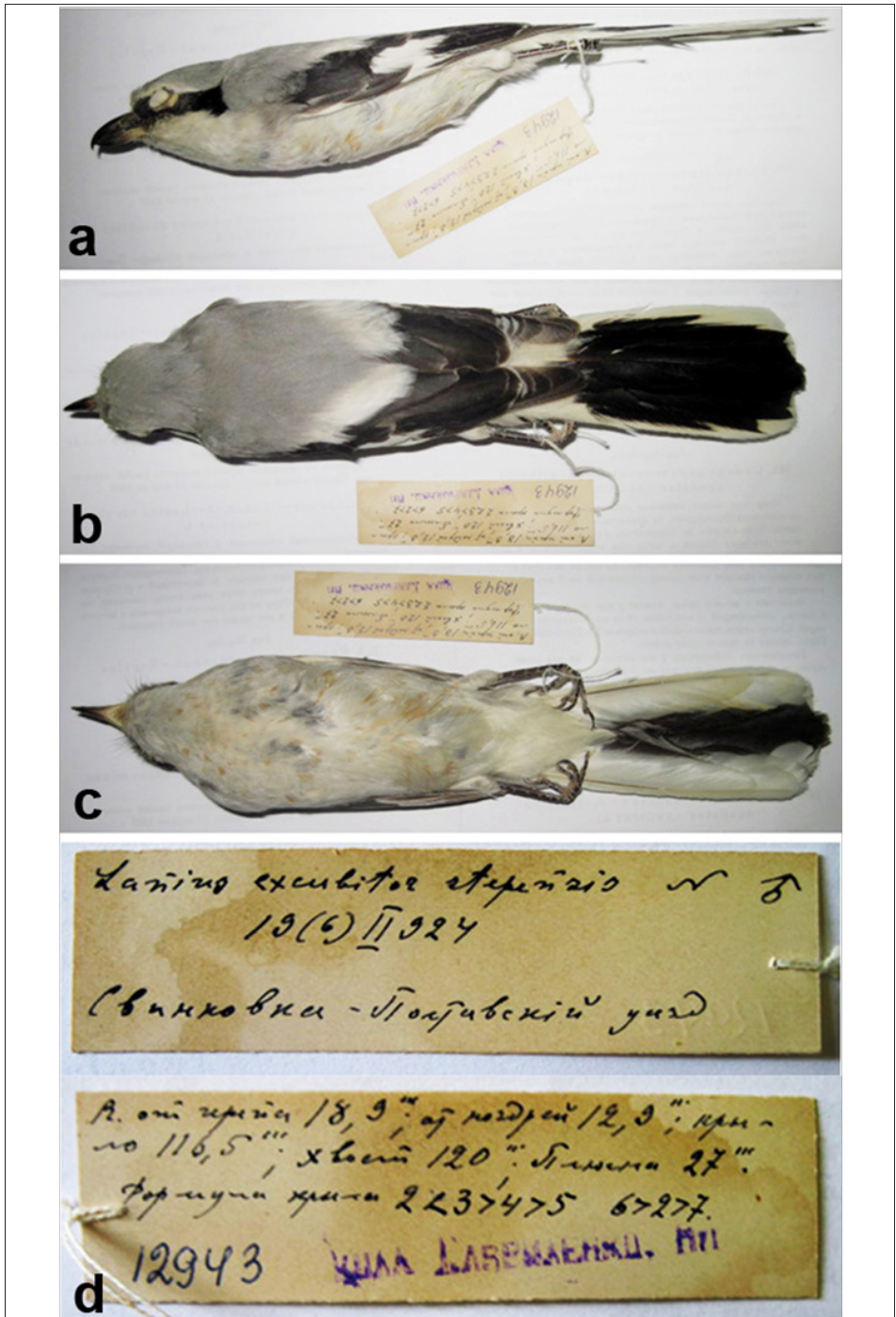


Fig. 4. Syntype of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKNU 12943): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko’s handwriting.



Fig. 5. Syntype of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKNU 12957): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko's handwriting.



Fig. 6. Specimen of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKKNU 12965): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko’s handwriting.

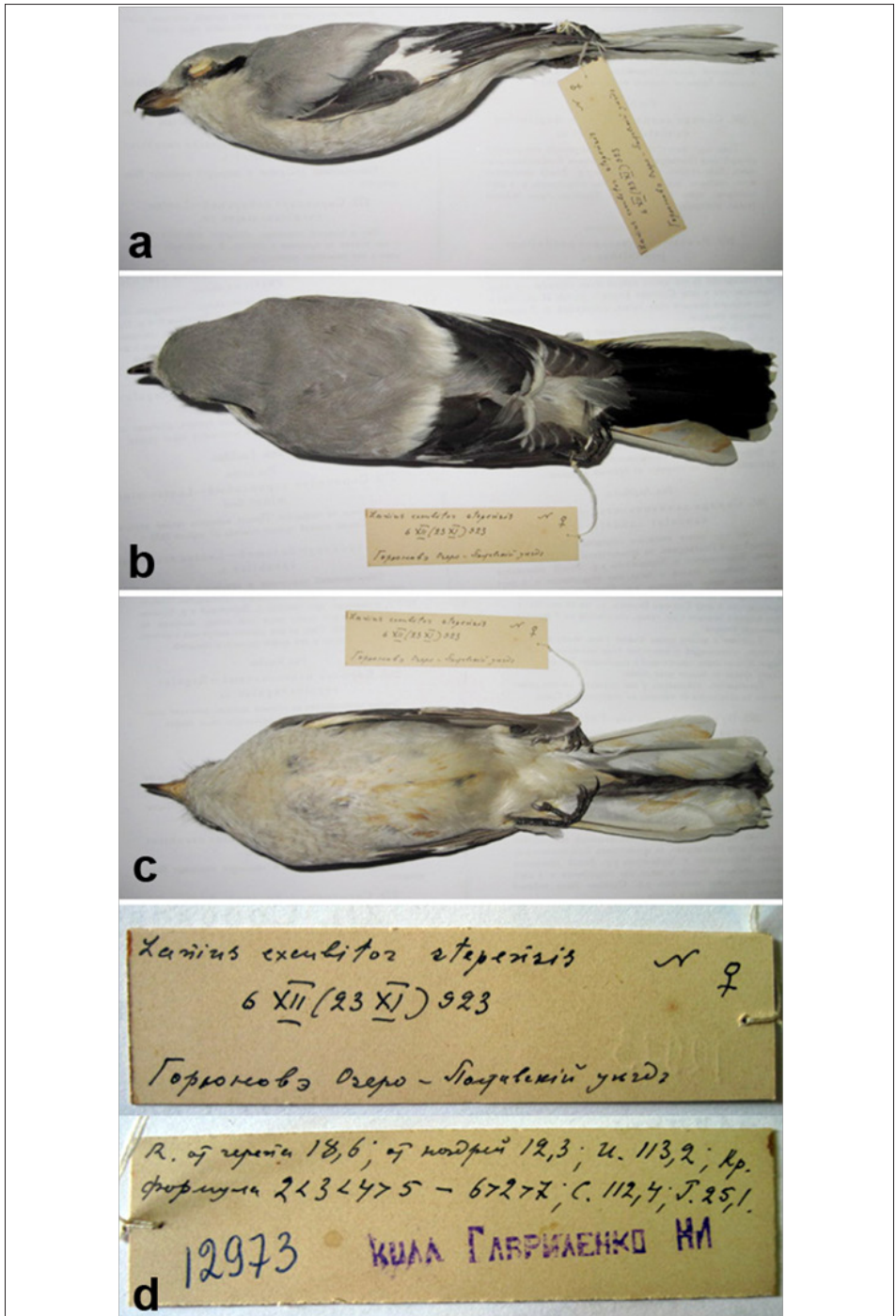


Fig. 7. Syntype of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKGNU 12973): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko's handwriting.

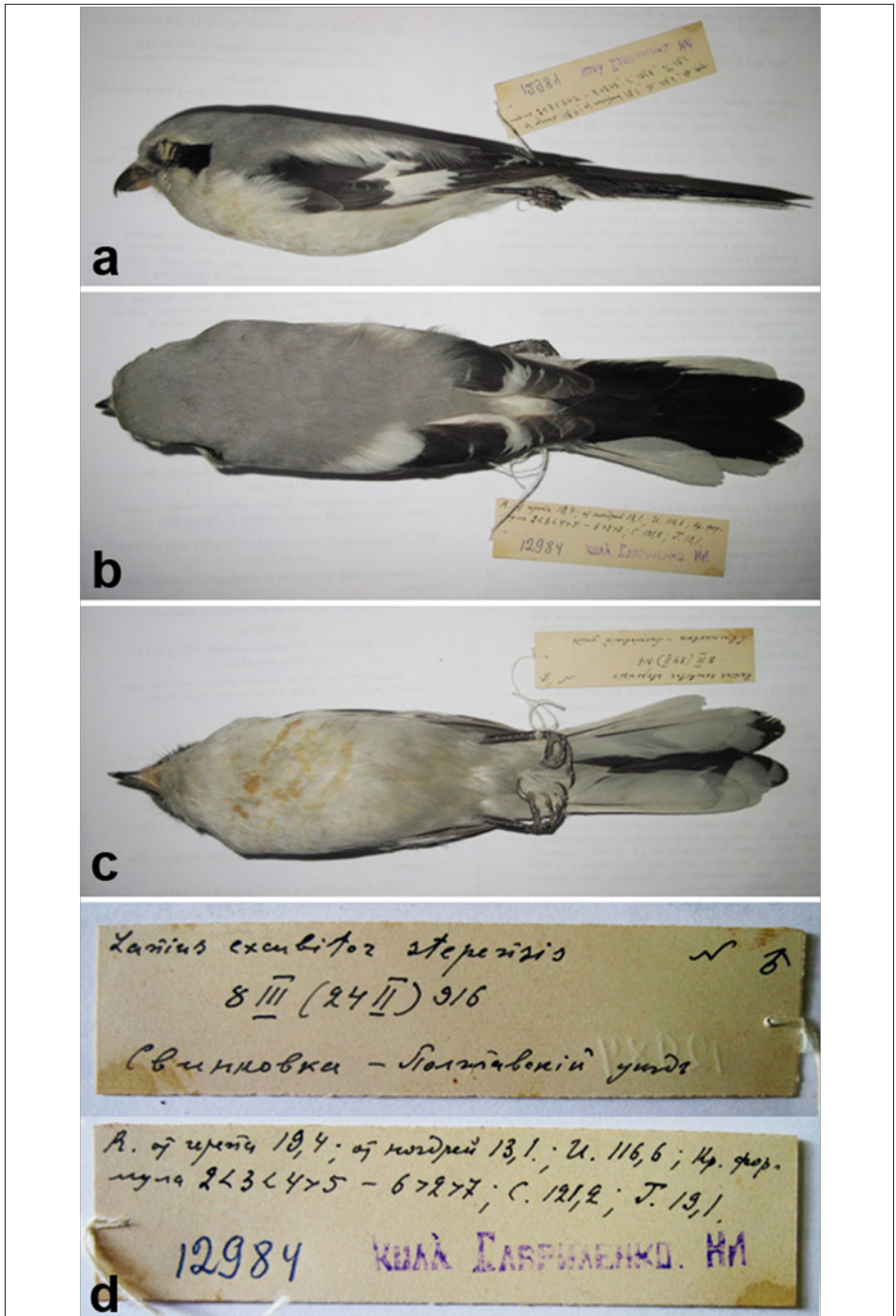


Fig. 8. Syntype of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKGNU 12984): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko’s handwriting.

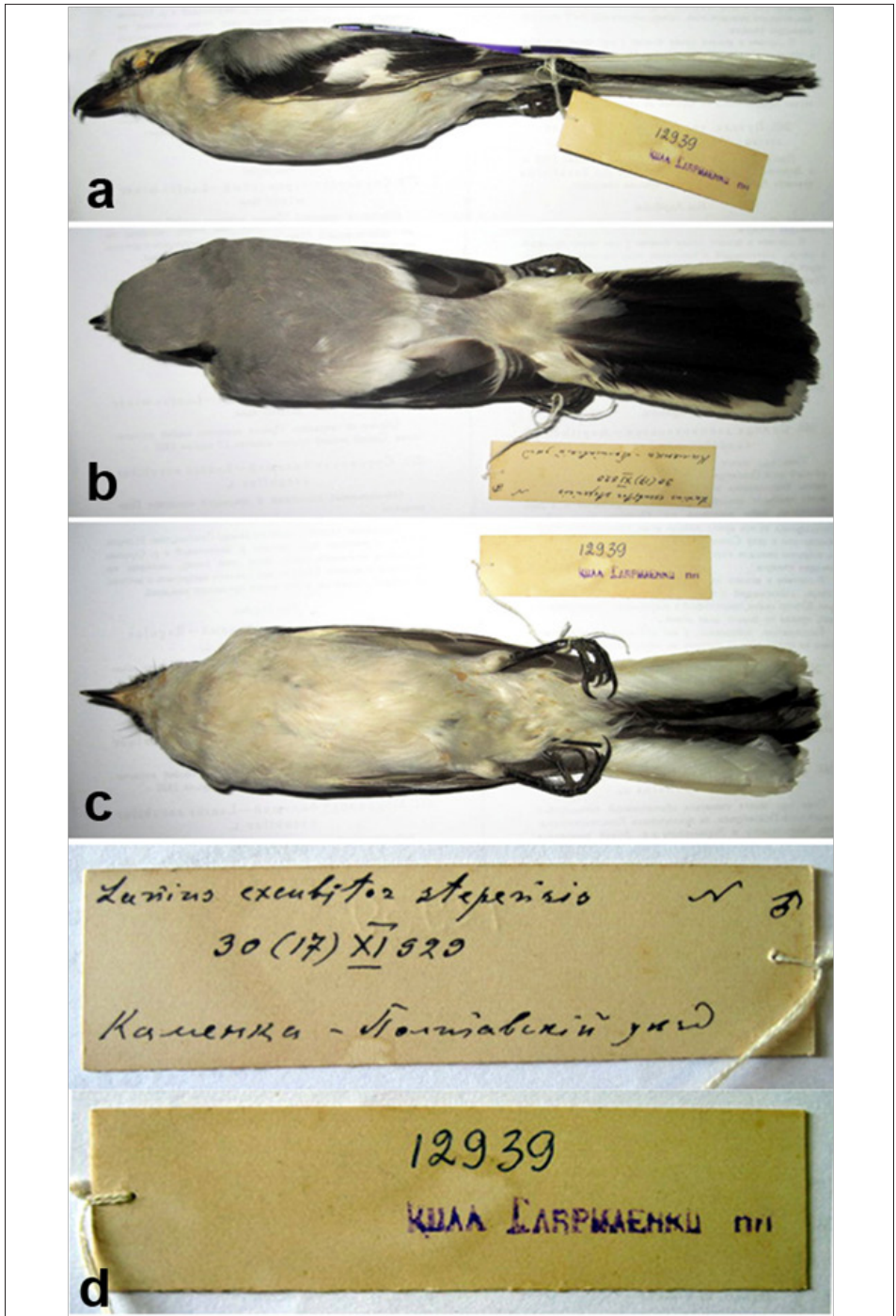


Fig. 9. Specimen of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKGNU 12939): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko's handwriting.

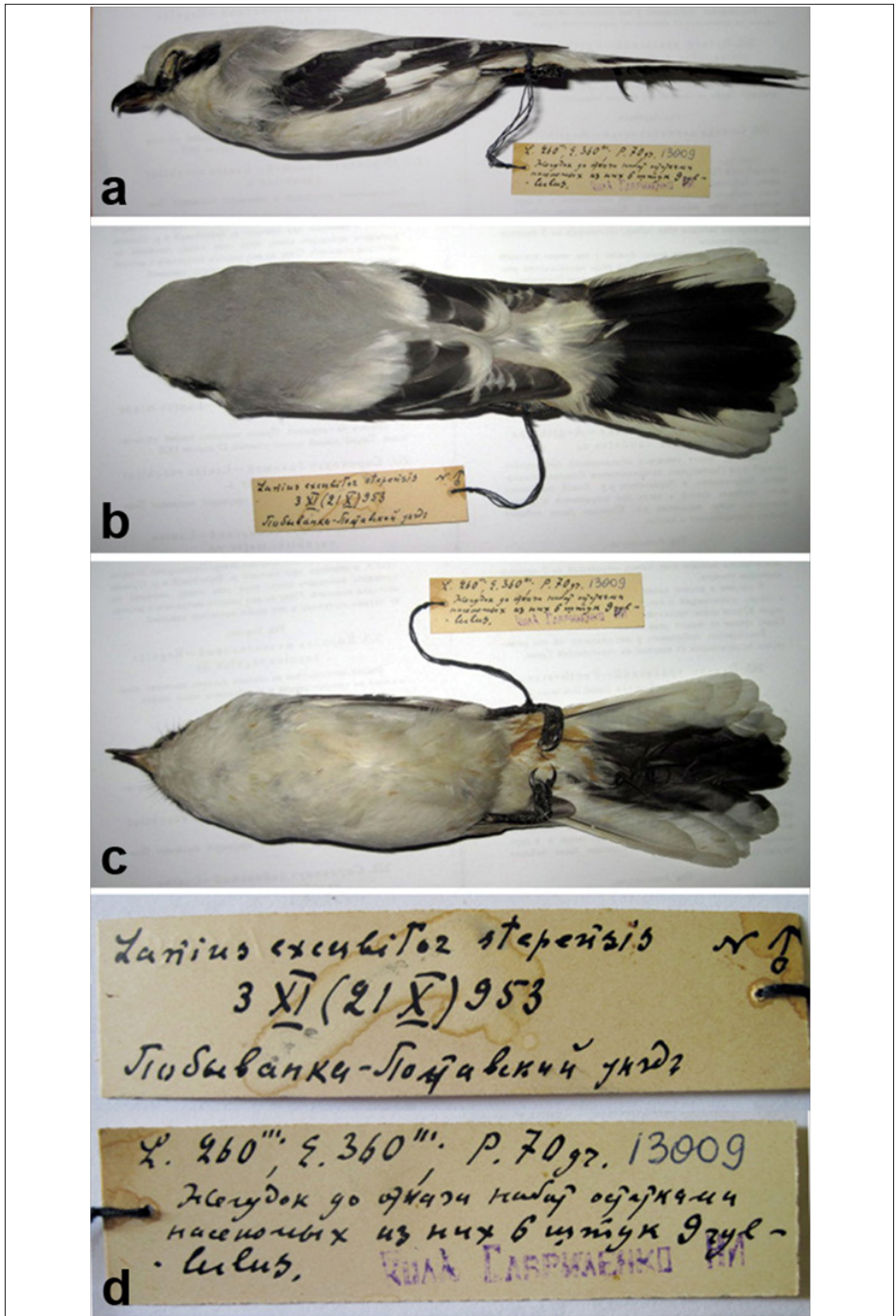


Fig. 10. Specimen of *Lanius excubitor stepensis* (MNKKNУ 13009): a – lateral view, b – dorsal view, c – ventral view, d – labels with Gavrilenko’s handwriting.

