Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery

home on the range

ISSUE 18 SPRING/SUMMER 2013

WHERE HAVE ALL THE HAWTHORNS GONE?

by Krista Cairns

inside:

The landscape is changing in the Napanee, Smiths Falls, Pembroke and Renfrew areas of the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike's home range in Ontario. The open grassy fields found throughout these areas once supported scattered stands of hawthorn, a spiny relative of apples and serviceberries, which are a key component of shrike breeding habitat in Ontario. Shrikes nest in these trees and the spines serve as impaling sites to stash prey. While hawthorns can still be found in these areas, field staff and volunteers alike are noticing fewer every year.

One culprit is the spread of apple-cedar rust, a fungus carried by red cedars. The disease forms spore-bearing galls in cedars, which seem to survive with the infection. In hawthorn it appears as rusty leaf-spots, and proves lethal. As red cedars continue to spread into new areas further north of their traditional ranges, they bring apple-cedar rust with them. This is bad news for hawthorn, but what about shrike?

In areas where hawthorn has become scarce and cedar dominates, shrikes have altered their behaviour. Shrikes will use red cedar as nesting sites; the fissured bark, forked branches, and sharp ends of broken branches are also used to wedge and hold prey in place of thorns. Barbed wire and other thorny species such as buckthorn are also used opportunistically. Where piles of cedars have been stacked into brush piles from efforts to reclaim open meadows from cedar invasion, shrikes use the dead branches for impaling.

Despite these adaptations, red cedar still pose a threat to shrike and other grassland birds. If left unchecked, red cedar may transform an open meadow to a uniform forest stand, as is being seen in some areas. Shrike depend on open areas with short-grass and spots of bare ground for hunting, and will typically abandon areas that become overgrown. Continued stewardship by landowners, ranchers and conservation organizations like Wildlife Preservation Canada is important to keep traditional breeding grounds suitable for future generations of shrikes.

Gall formed by apple-cedar rust

Krista Cairns

spot a shrike, help save a species

DEDICATED TEAM 2013

Every spring, the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program under the management of Wildlife Preservation Canada (WPC) brings together a talented team of conservationists to meet the needs of a busy field breeding season. They spend their season interacting with landowners, scouting for shrikes returning from the wintering grounds, searching for nests, and working at the field breeding and release sites. Their work is vital to the progress of the recovery program. This year's team members introduce themselves here.

Hazel Wheeler, Carden Biologist I couldn't be more excited to join WPC as this year's Carden Shrike Biologist. I recently received my MSc from Trent, where I used radio-telemetry to study Chimney Swift foraging patterns in Guelph. Before this, I was with Bird Studies Canada where I worked on many projects, chased many birds, and met many wonderful and devoted people (volunteers and professionals alike). I've dabbled with prairie dogs in southwestern Saskatchewan and Arctic Terns in northern Manitoba, but my heart lies in species-at-risk conservation. I'm pleased to be able to contribute to recovery efforts for shrike, and I look forward to adding Eastern Loggerhead Shrike to my 'Birds That've Bit Me" list.

Jonathan Willans, Napanee Biologist After spending the last 2 years in Swansea, Wales, earning my masters degree in Aquatic Ecology and Conservation, I am happy to be back in Canada working to help one of Ontario's endangered species. Prior to returning to university, I gained a great deal of experience working for various conservation organizations in Canada, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. While working on these projects, I gained experience studying tropical and North American birds, large mammals and sea turtles. I am excited about the upcoming field season and for the chance to work with our dedicated volunteers that are helping to protect this rare bird. Hopefully this year will be a great year for Ontario's Loggerhead Shrikes! Hope to see you in the field.

About the Project

In May of 2003, Wildlife Preservation Canada signed a Conservation Agreement with Environment Canada - Ontario Region, making WPC responsible for coordinating and implementing the recovery program for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike in Ontario.

For More Information

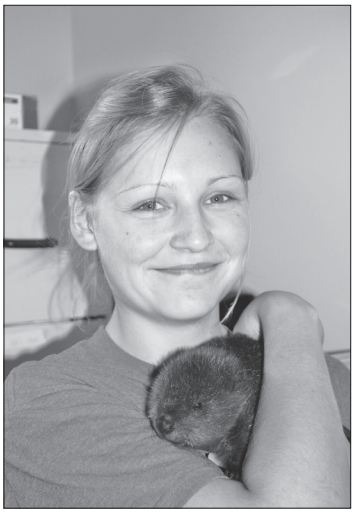
To learn more about the recovery program, email info@shrike.ca or visit www.shrike.ca. You can also contact Wildlife Preservation Canada toll-free at 1-800-956-6608 or via email admin@wildlifepreservation.ca or by writing to RR#5, 5420 Highway 6 N., Guelph, ON N1H 6J2.

Project Partners

Wildlife Preservation Canada • Environment Canada • Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources • Couchiching Conservancy • Mounstberg Conservation Area • Toronto Zoo • African Lion Safari • Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums • Bird Studies Canada • Over 250 Ontario Landowners • Numerous Local Naturalist Groups • and more to come!

Emily Bird, Napanee Assistant I just finished my BES from the University of Waterloo specializing in Environment and Resource Studies with a Minor in Biology. I did my undergraduate thesis on the COSEWIC status of Louisiana waterthrush in Canada. I spent last summer working with Bird Studies Canada monitoring forest bird species-at-risk, Louisiana waterthrush, cerulean warblers, Acadian flycatchers and hooded warblers. I am very excited to again spend my summer studying another of Ontario's endangered bird species.

Stephanie Cassutt, Carden Assistant I began my studies with a strong emphasis on natural resource management, particularly forest and wildlife management, and earned a college diploma in Ottawa as a Forestry Technician. After working in the field of forestry for 3 years, I was eager to continue my education and take a different approach. I earned my Honours Bachelors degree in Environmental Studies at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, where my main focuses of study were conservation ecology and wildlife biology. My interest in ornithology was initialized early on when I spent time as a volunteer field ornithologist at the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory (TCBO) in Thunder Bay. From that experience, I developed my undergraduate thesis, studying the effect of climate change and spring migration of wood-warblers. I hope to be a beneficial member to the Loggerhead Shrike recovery team and hope to contribute to an already successful program by sharing knowledge and experience with the team.



Jacqui Gunn, Carden Technician On completing my bachelor's degree in Animal Welfare and Behaviour at the University of Chester in the UK, I worked as a Seasonal Animal Ranger at a wildlife park in Yorkshire caring for a variety of species including overly excitable camels, giraffe and very cheeky squirrel monkeys. I've also spent 3 months as an intern at Sandy Pines Wildlife Sanctuary in Napanee where I learnt how to treat injured Canadian wildlife and it was here I realised that for me, it's all about the birds! My love of birds now brings me to Carden where I'm excited to get to know the shrikes and be part of the recovery team.

And the team includes you! If you don't spot a shrike this season, you may spot one of these biologists by the side of the road, searching for the elusive bird with their spotting scope. Feel free to stop, say hello, ask questions. We hope to see you!

See a Shrike!

For an opportunity to see an endangered species, the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike and learn more about our program, join us for a tour of our field breeding site as part of the ***Carden Nature Festival on Friday, May 31st.*** *For more information about the Festival and to register for the tour visit:*

http://www.regionalguidebook.com/community/community-organizations/carden-nature-festival

CAN SHRIKES HELP SAVE THE MEADOWLARK?

by Julie Stauffer

Biologist Dr. Amy Chabot can't imagine Ontario's grasslands without the stunning yellow breast and sweet song of the Eastern Meadowlark. But the stocky little birds — "flying tanks," as she calls them — are in trouble.

Since 1970, their numbers have plummeted 62 per cent, prompting the Ontario government to add the meadowlark to the province's list of threatened species last year. Now the question is how to help them.

Because shrikes and meadowlarks share the same habitat, Wildlife Preservation Canada (WPC) is betting that the techniques we're using to save the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike could also benefit this fellow grassland bird. That's why Amy is heading up a new meadowlark project for WPC.

Her first job will be collecting key statistics. "We're lacking even basic data on these birds," Amy explains. "Reproductive success estimates are few and far between, [and] there've been next to no banding studies on them to look at return rates."

It's a task that requires plenty of patience. Because the females are very secretive, Amy expects to spend many hours this summer watching where the males go so that she can track down nests and monitor the number of eggs they produce, the number that hatch, and the number of young that fledge.

She'll also need ingenuity to band the birds and attach the geolocators that will let us pinpoint migration routes and wintering grounds. Meadowlarks are notoriously tough to capture, so Amy plans to test out different types of traps and bait. "This really is a pilot year," she says. "My thinking cap is on in terms of how to catch them safely."

Her other key job will be talking to people with the power to protect meadowlark habitat: farmers, solar and wind farm operators, and aggregate owners. Like shrikes, meadowlarks nest mainly on privately owned land. Unlike shrikes, they nest on the ground, making land management especially important. Mowing hay at the wrong time, for example, can destroy young birds.

However, rather than telling landowners "you can't do this" or "you must do that," she wants to find solutions that let businesses, farms and meadowlarks all thrive. "It's a much more collaborative stewardship type approach," she says.

Nor is it just landowners and Eastern Meadowlarks that stand to win. "Hopefully what we do for meadowlarks benefits shrikes and a whole bunch of other grassland birds too," says Amy.