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RINGING IN A NEW GENERATION

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At nine to eleven days old, shrike nestlings are being diligently cared for by their parents. This is also the age at which these young birds become candidates for banding.

Nestling banding activities have not occurred in Ontario since 2005, when low nesting success raised concerns that human presence at the nest may pose an increased risk of nest failure by potentially attracting avian predators, especially if parents make an alarm call. With the wild population so critically small, a precautionary approach was taken and all activities at nest trees were halted. Monitoring activities since then have occurred remotely from a distance of at least 100 m from the nest tree.

While remote observations adequately captured some information, other knowledge was being lost. Important measures of population health, such as recruitment and dispersal of wild-born young and the age structure of the population became difficult to determine. These missing pieces could be vital to shrike recovery.

Recently, the Canadian Wildlife Service finished compiling and analyzing the historic data and found no link between nestling banding activities and nest failures. As a result, nestling banding was reintroduced this year in Carden, conducted by Amy Chabot, who has extensive shrike banding experience in Canada and the U.S. Protocols were revised to ensure all steps were being taken to minimize potential risks. Nests were chosen based on site access, pair behaviour, and the absence of potential predators determined through monitoring.

A total of 19 nestlings from four nests were banded this year, receiving a silver identification band on their left leg. Nest monitoring continued after banding to determine fledging success and track fledgling survival. All but one nestling was confirmed to have fledged successfully, representing a minimum 95% survival rate. As a result of this year's success, nestling banding will continue in Carden in 2011.

We hope to see some of these banded youngsters return to Carden next year! By banding nestlings we gain a better understanding of the Ontario population and the reasons for its decline. The addition of this data allows for continual evaluation of the program, and ensures that the safest and most effective activities are being implemented.

Ten-day old shrike nestlings



Tracy Anderson

*spot a
shrike,
help
save a
species*

WHAT IS CRITICAL HABITAT?

by Julie Stauffer

What constitutes critical shrike habitat? And what does it mean if it's found on your property? With the release of Environment

Canada's draft recovery strategy for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike at the end of October, these have become pressing questions for a number of Ontario landowners.

The strategy serves as a roadmap to achieving Environment Canada's long-term target of at least 80 breeding pairs of shrike in Ontario. For the most part, it calls on us to continue what we've already been doing: breeding shrikes in captivity and releasing them into the wild, trying to pin down the shrike's migration routes and wintering grounds and monitoring the wild population.

But it's the section on critical habitat that has left many stakeholders concerned and confused.

Which definition?

Much of that confusion comes from the fact that although Environment Canada is legally required to define and identify shrike habitat — and to protect it on Crown land — it's the province that is responsible for protecting endangered species and habitat on private land, where most Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes are found.

Until now, the province has been defining critical habitat as all "suitable" habitat within a 400-metre radius of any tree where shrikes have been observed nesting within the last five years. That habitat includes short grasslands or pastures interspersed with nesting trees or shrubs and perching areas, but not wetlands or forest.

However, Environment Canada is proposing a more precautionary approach. The federal definition would roughly double the amount of land that qualifies as critical habitat because it includes any suitable shrike habitat

that touches that 400-metre "donut" and because it is based on confirmed nesting within the past ten years, rather than five.

Using aerial photos and field survey data, Environment Canada has identified 108 patches of habitat in Carden, Napanee, Pembroke, Grey-Bruce and Smiths Falls that meet the criteria. Together, these add up to just over 6,800 hectares.

That leaves many landowners and conservationists wondering which definition will apply to private land. Because Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources is still reviewing the draft recovery strategy, it hasn't made any public announcements on the question.

They're also concerned that although Environment Canada identified critical habitat based on the most recent information available, some areas that are no longer — or have never been — considered suitable

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 at <admin@wildlifepreservation.ca> or by writing to RR#5, 5420 Highway 6 N., Guelph, ON N1H 6J2.

Project Partners

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

habitat have still been included.

What does this mean for landowners?

Under the federal Species at Risk Act, your main responsibility is not to destroy critical habitat. If you've had shrike breeding on your property, you can probably carry on with business as usual since you're clearly doing something right.

The restrictions come into play if you want to make a major land use change, such as converting your property into a quarry, a subdivision or a solar farm. In that case, you'll need to have a detailed environmental study performed, which the government will use to decide whether or not to grant permission.

Wildlife Preservation Canada's position

WPC knows that shrikes won't survive without the support of willing landowners. That's why our focus is on creating win/win solutions that benefit both shrikes and landowners — and we believe governments should be taking a similar approach.

“There's no question that we're in favour of protecting and stewarding shrike habitat, but we believe that the carrot approach is much more appropriate and much more effective than the stick,” says Elaine Williams, Executive Director of WPC. “We're also in favour of government compensating landowners who maintain critical habitat, since they are providing such a vital ecological service to society as a whole.”

An opportunity to speak up

Environment Canada is accepting public comments on the draft recovery strategy until December 17. That feedback will then be used to create a finalized strategy in the new year.

Typical shrike habitat in Carden - scattered hawthorns in open short grassland.

If you're unhappy with the critical habitat definitions in the strategy, if you believe your land has been wrongly identified as critical habitat or if there are other aspects of the recovery strategy you disagree with, this is your opportunity to let the government know.

You can download a copy of the draft strategy at http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default_e.cfm?documentID=948. To obtain Environment Canada's maps, or to receive a hard copy of the draft strategy, contact Liz Sauer at the Canadian Wildlife Service either by phone: 416-739-5827 or email: liz.sauer@ec.gc.ca. To submit comments, either use the comment box on the website or submit them to Liz Sauer.

In the coming weeks, WPC will be submitting our own comments on the strategy. “Overall, we're pleased to have a clear direction laid out that will guide our recovery efforts,” says Williams. “While there are obviously concerns around the critical habitat definitions, WPC will continue to work with the federal and provincial governments and private landowners to help resolve the issues.”

If you are a landowner in Carden or Napanee, either WPC or Couchiching Conservancy should have sent you a more detailed letter on this issue. If you haven't received it yet, please contact us at 1-800-956-6608.



Janet Lapiere

NEWS AND NOTES

by Jessica Steiner

Disappointing drop in wild population: After the encouraging increasing trend seen over the last several years, it was disappointing to see the number of wild pairs drop by about 1/3 since last season. 23 pairs were confirmed in the province: 17 in Carden, 5 in Napanee and 1 in Pembroke. The majority successfully bred, fledging at least 64 young. Interestingly, there was a large proportion of single birds, resulting in unique observations of cooperative breeding. The harsh winter experienced by many south-eastern U.S. states where our shrikes are suspected to winter is potentially to blame – a reminder of the continued vulnerability of the species.

Geolocators – small steps to success: Given the decline in the wild population, remarkably two 2009-release birds wearing geolocators returned to Carden, thrilling all those involved in the program. Both were successfully trapped and the geolocators retrieved, but unfortunately both devices had malfunctioned; data collection had been cut short and no early migratory movements were captured. There is no apparent reason for the failure. But all was not lost. We confirmed that shrike can successfully migrate and return to breeding grounds while wearing the device and that good, clean data is being collected while the device is working. Optimistically, we released a further 43 geocator-adorned young this year, confident that next year will yield full results. These birds are sporting a Red band on the right leg, and silver band on the left. Please keep your eyes peeled next spring and report all shrike sightings to us!

New Milestones: Returning captive birds made a strong appearance in the wild this year, with 7 previously released birds spotted on breeding grounds. Two of these had been released in 2006, the first 4-year old birds to return. One of these returned to the same territory

it had nested in last year, the first confirmation of a bird returning in multiple years. This year also marked the first time two captive-release birds were observed paired and nesting in the wild. And if that wasn't enough to celebrate, a 2009 Carden release bird was found breeding in Quebec – the first pair this province has had since 1995! Thanks to all those who reported their sightings to us.

Feasts for the mind: Annual recognition dinners in our core recovery areas continue to be well-attended and successful events. This year, our Carden dinner was co-hosted by Dufferin Aggregates, who launched their new DVD *From Confrontation to Collaboration on the Carden Alvar: A model for resource extraction companies*, to great praise. Attendees of the Napanee dinner were treated to an informative talk by a University of McGill student studying short-eared owls on Amherst Island. Bill and Barb McNair were presented with a recognition gift at the Grey-Bruce dinner for their long-standing dedication to shrike recovery – generously providing hospitality to captive shrike and staff alike!

GBS, part 2: The second year of the Grassland Bird Survey saw a significant increase in volunteer participation and resulting search effort. Several reports of shrike were received, as well as sightings of other species at risk including golden-winged warblers, red-headed woodpeckers and common nighthawks. Thanks to all who participated, lending their eyes and ears to the program – we hope to see you next year! If you are interested in more information or signing up for GBS 2011, please contact Wildlife Preservation Canada (1-800-956-6608, admin@wildlifepreservation.ca)

