

2011 Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Field Report Season Results

Wild Population

After the encouraging increasing trend seen over the last several years, it was disappointing that the number of wild pairs observed in 2011 remained at a similar level to 2010 (approximately a third of 2009). Twenty-one pairs were confirmed in the province: 13 in Carden, 7 in Napanee and 1 in Pembroke. There were no pairs confirmed in Fenelon Falls (Carden), Grey-Bruce, Manitoulin or Smiths Falls this season. The harsh winter experienced by many south-eastern U.S. states where ELOSH are suspected to winter is a potential factor in the decline seen – a reminder of the susceptibility of this small population to stochastic events. Fourteen of these pairs fledged a total of at least 48 young.

Interestingly, there was a large number of single birds reported in the province this year: 2 (1 confirmed) in Napanee, 4 (1 confirmed) in Carden, 3 (2 confirmed) in Manitoulin, 8 (3 confirmed) in Grey-Bruce and 5 (all unconfirmed) in Smiths Falls. Indicating that there are a large number of birds in the province that remained unpaired again this year.

Survey effort this season was again greatly enhanced by dedicated volunteers from both the Napanee Adopt-A-Site program and Ontario-wide Grassland Bird Survey (GBS). Participation in the GBS increased substantially this year to 111 volunteers. There were 12 observations of shrikes reported to the GBS coordinator, but despite follow-up visits by both the GBS coordinator and WPC field staff these observations remain unconfirmed. For more information on either of these programs please contact us.

This year saw the return to breeding grounds of 3 Ontario captive-bred birds previously released from the field breeding program, including one 4-year old bird. This bird has returned to the Dyer's Bay release site in two consecutive years, but has remained unpaired in both years. The juvenile return rate of Ontario release birds was up to 2.6% (2 of 76 released in 2010) this year; within the range of return rates observed in previous years. Of particular note this season was the confirmation of a 2010-release bird from Carden that was bred at the Toronto Zoo, returning to Carden, breeding with a wild female and successfully fledgling at least 3 young. This type of breeding and release program is known as "hacking" and we'll be experimenting more with hacking in future years as a way to increase the number of young for release.

The banding program continued this season, and all wild adults banded this year received white over a silver ID band on the right leg as part of their unique 4-colour combination. Nestling banding occurred in Carden this year, with young banded with a silver ID band at 9-11 days old a few days prior to fledging. This will help us to track recruitment of wild young into the population next year. As always we encourage birders to try and determine band combinations on any shrikes spotted, and of course report any sightings to us! (1-800-956-6608 or admin@wildlifepreservation.ca).

Field Breeding and Release

In late April, birds were paired for breeding at our facilities: the Carden and Dyer's Bay field breeding and release sites, Toronto Zoo and African Lion Safari. Seventeen pairs successfully bred this year, with 8 producing second clutches. Twenty-one young were released in 2011 to supplement the wild population. This is a lower than previous years and is due to the need to recruit a higher number of young to augment the captive population and a higher than normal

level of mortality among our captive young this year. We retained a large number of the young (27) for our captive population as breeding stock for the future. Almost half our captive population is composed of birds within a few years of the end of their reproductive years. The retained young from 2011 will provide an infusion of young breeders that can produce large numbers of young for the next 8-10 years and enhance the genetic integrity of our captive stock. We are also working with veterinarians from the Toronto Zoo and Ontario Veterinary College to determine the cause(s) of this high mortality rate among young produced this year. Fortunately, the vets have indicated that the deaths do not appear to be due to an infectious disease.

All release birds received unique 4-colour band combinations, unless they were wearing a geolocator (see below).

Geolocators

One of the returning captive-reared birds this year was released with a geolocator in 2010. He was caught, the device was removed, but once again the device had malfunctioned and only the initial, very early migratory movements in Ontario had been recorded. This is more data than was retrieved in 2010, but still a disappointing result. Geolocators represent our best chance to learn more about the migration routes and wintering grounds of this species – a big knowledge gap that is currently hindering recovery efforts.

Sixteen birds were released with a geolocators this year. The birds were equipped with a silver band over a red band on the left leg and no bands on the right. Please keep your eyes peeled next spring and report all shrike sightings to us! (1-800-956-6608, admin@wildlifepreservation.ca)

Habitat Stewardship and Outreach

Over the summer months our field biologists in Napanee, Carden and Grey-Bruce met with landowners to investigate potential projects and several priority projects have been identified in each area. In Carden, project planning has been in co-operation with the Couchiching Conservancy through the Integrated Carden Conservation Strategy. Habitat stewardship project development and implementation will occur over the fall/winter.

Media

Several articles pertaining to the Recovery Program appeared this season:

- An article on the shrike program is featured in the Manitoulin Expositor Special Canada Day Edition. “*Islander urged to keep and eye out for endangered bird*”. Grey-Bruce Biologist Katherine Robbins and GBS Coordinator Erica Lagios were interviewed.
- An article written by Carden Biologist Janet Lapierre was submitted to Prairie Smoke (newsletter for the Carden Field Naturalists) in June. “*Summertime in Shrike Country*”

Public Presentations and Site Tours

WPC’s Species Recovery Biologist, Tara Imlay, staffed display booths for International Migratory Bird Day at the Toronto Zoo (May 14), Carden Nature Festival (June 3-4), and Dufferin Carden Quarry Open House (June 25). A display booth was set up and staffed by WPC’s Grey-Bruce Biologist, Katherine Robbins, at the Owen Sound Fall Fair on September 8 and 9.

Tours were held at the Carden Field Site as part of the Carden Nature Festival on June 3.

A talk was given at the Norland Public Library on June 2 (Carden core).

A presentation to the Owen Sound Field Naturalists was given by WPC's Grey-Bruce Biologist on September 8.

Landowner Appreciation Dinners

Again, this year, we hosted three ELOSH Landowner and Volunteer Appreciation dinners and they were very successful this year. The Carden dinner was held Aug 24 at the Kirkfield Lions Club. Nearly 80 people were in attendance this year, and sixteen people attended a tour of the Carden field breeding site prior to dinner. The Grey-Bruce dinner was held Aug 28 at the Dyer's Bay field site and saw at least 40 people in attendance. A small group received a tour of the site. At both events, staff gave short presentations on the season's results and outreach materials were made available. The Napanee dinner was held on Sept 26 at the local Lions Club following the local Recovery Action Group meeting.

Program Funding

WPC is grateful for the funding support for this year's shrike recovery activities from the following sources: Canadian Wildlife Service, the Ontario Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, the federal Habitat Stewardship Program, and International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators. We are also grateful to Boisset Family Estates, makers of French Rabbit wines, for providing the bridge funding necessary to launch the field season.

By Tara Imlay, Species Recovery Biologist, WPC