



home on the range

SHRIKE FACILITY TAKES FLIGHT

by Hazel Wheeler

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spot a shrike, help save a species

The loggerhead shrike captive population continues to grow, and with it, so does the network of partner facilities. Our newest partner takes us farther south than we've gone before, down to the home of the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the iconic Grand Ole Opry. Yes, we've made it all the way down to Nashville, Tennessee.

The Nashville Zoo has been involved with shrike since 2015, when they started working on wild birds in Tennessee. They were out there monitoring nest sites, banding adults, and using radio telemetry to track how much space birds actually use in the state. The loggerhead shrikes in Tennessee aren't in such a dire state as they are in Ontario, but the population there has declined 70% since the 1950s, which is quite enough to warrant some intervention.

We came to know the Nashville Zoo through a meeting hosted last year by our other US partner facility, the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute. Nashville was keen to get involved in the captive side of shrike work, so when we were looking for homes for four older birds that were retired from breeding, we looked to them. Joe DeGraauw, the avian curator at the Nashville Zoo, came to Ontario this summer to tour the shrike facilities and see how things were set up, and once he was back home he quickly set to work building brand new enclosures for these four birds.

It was mid-November when we drove them down; we've never moved shrike by air, so rather than risk a stressful move for these four birds, all of which were over 10 years old, we decided that a road-trip was the way to go. It was about 14 hours in the car to get there, and though we arrived in Nashville well after dark, all the birds took well to their fancy new digs, and they continue to thrive.

Of course just because the birds are retired doesn't mean they won't be kept busy. We'll be working with Joe and his team at the Nashville Zoo over the winter to start looking at how captivity affects our shrikes' urge to migrate, and these birds will help us develop the best methods to do that.

A big welcome goes to Nashville Zoo, our enthusiastic new partner in loggerhead shrike recovery!



BANDED BIRDS ABOUND

by Hazel Wheeler

It's always a thrill when we at Wildlife Preservation Canada headquarters get news that one of our captive-bred eastern loggerhead shrike has been spotted in the wild, and this year, we had a lot to be excited about. To start, two of our colour-banded birds were seen as they migrated through Ontario at the end of the summer. One bird, released at the Napanee field site, was spotted by a number of avid birders in Presqu'île Provincial Park, in mid-September; and another, likely released in Carden, was spotted in Stratford, ON, over a few days in early October. Towards the end of October, we also received a sighting from farther afield, when a keen-eyed citizen scientist spotted a colour-banded bird in Virginia. This is the third time in five years that a bird released in Ontario has been seen in Virginia outside of the breeding season, highlighting the connection between the two areas.

As colour-band resightings go, these reports alone would make for satisfying season results, with each of these birds adding another piece to the puzzle of where our birds go in the winter. It doesn't end there, though, and the sighting to come was beyond what any of us with the shrike program expected.

It all started with a small side-project initiated by this year's Napanee Shrike Biologist, Cayla Naumann. Cayla wanted to set up a time-lapse camera at the feeding corrals where we continue to feed our recently-released birds, to see if she could get a more accurate record of who was using the corrals. In reviewing the images, Cayla made a strange discovery when she saw a bird with a colour bands combination

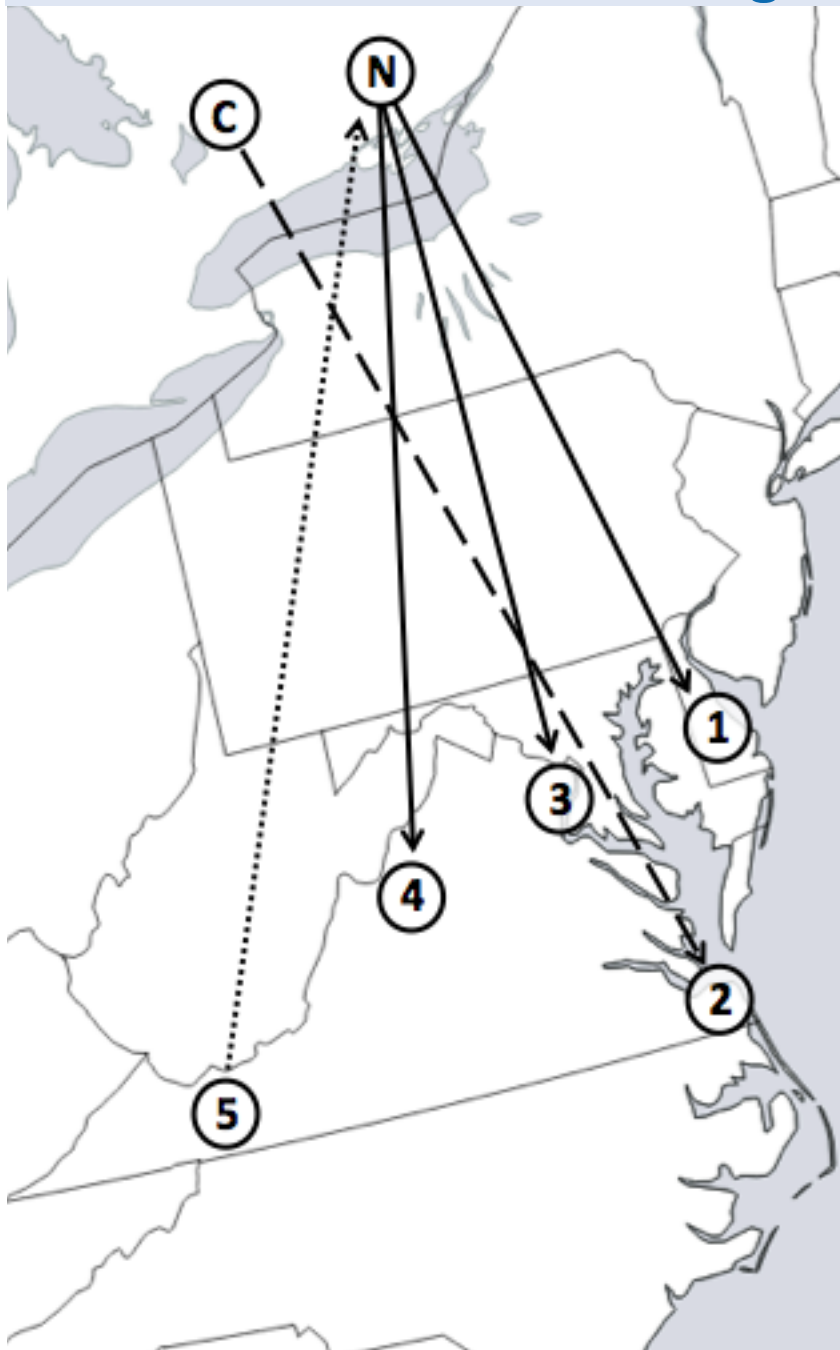
for which there was no record in Ontario. The reason: this bird, a female, had been banded this past May as part of a breeding pair in Virginia, over 900km to the south of where she was caught on our camera at the end of the summer. We were astounded! This isn't the first documented case of a long-distance dispersal by a shrike after the breeding season, but the fact that she traveled northward was completely unexpected. What caused her to leave her territory, we'll never know, but a question we can hopefully answer now is: will she go back? With the growing evidence of a connection between Ontario and Virginia shrike populations, the biologists down south will certainly be out this winter, waiting and watching to see if she returns.



Sergio Harding shows the leg bands of a bird after it was banded in Virginia in May 2016.

Photo: Rich Bailey

What has colour-banding shown us?



LEGEND

N Napanee core area

C Carden core area

1. A wild bird banded in summer 2011 in Napanee was seen in Delaware in November of that year
2. A wild bird banded in summer 2011 in Carden was seen in Virginia Beach, VA for two months over the winter
3. A captive-bred bird, released in Napanee in 2012, showed up at the Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge in September of that year
4. A captive-bred bird, released in Napanee this year, was spotted in Moscow, VA in October
5. A wild bird banded in Virginia this spring made its way to Napanee for the end of the summer



About the Project

Since 2003, Wildlife Preservation Canada has been responsible for coordinating and implementing the recovery program for the eastern loggerhead shrike in Ontario.

Learn More

Visit www.wildlifepreservation.ca. You can also contact Wildlife Preservation Canada 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 • African Lion Safari • Bird Studies Canada • Environment and Climate Change Canada • Couchiching Conservancy • Little Ray's Nature Centre • Mountsberg Raptor Centre • Nashville Zoo at Grassmere • The Nature Conservancy of Canada • Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry • Ontario Parks Queen's University • Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute • Toronto Zoo • York University • Numerous local naturalist

TALKS ON THE ROCKS

by Jessica Steiner and Hazel Wheeler

On September 20th, over 70 people congregated at the Roblin Wesleyan Church to learn about the importance of alvars and grasslands, and the tools and resources available to steward these unique habitats. This workshop was hosted by the Napanee Plain Joint Initiative, which is a group of organizations and agencies dedicated to the conservation of the Napanee Plain. Those in attendance came from a diverse range of backgrounds, and included a strong showing of local private landowners, as well as First Nations, stewardship groups, NGOs, Conservation Authorities, and three levels of government.

Marg Isbester, Deputy Mayor for Greater Napanee, kicked off the day by sharing a memory from her childhood, when her mother told her that alvars were “fairy gardens”, so should be treated with care. For those who are familiar with the wonder and beauty of some of the small, delicate plants that are found in these areas, the fairy fantasy was both charming and astute. Mark Stabb from the Nature Conservancy of Canada took the helm after that, emceeding us through a series of interesting presentations that he hoped would “take the ‘plain’ out of ‘Napanee Plain’”, as we learned about a landscape that was anything but.

Attendees were introduced to many of the provincially and even globally rare plant and animal species that make alvars and native grasslands such important habitat areas. We learned how the federal government is working to identify grassland “hotspots” that support declining grassland bird populations; retired grazer specialist, Jack Kyle, taught us about how to mow hay and pastures bird-friendly; and WPC’s Lead Biologist for the shrike program, Hazel Wheeler, introduced us to the Loggerhead Shrike Landowner’s Guide (available at wildlifepreservation.ca), which has concrete steps that can be

taken for shrike habitat stewardship on private lands.

Following a full morning of presentations, the groups then spent the afternoon in the field, exploring local alvars where we could see examples stewardship projects, and experiencing first-hand the magic of the “fairy gardens” of the Napanee Plain.

Many thanks to everyone who attended and helped to make this event such a success!

This event was made possible with financial support from the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada.



Prairie smoke is just one of the many unique plants found almost exclusively on alvars in Ontario.

Think you may be interested in attending or participating in such an event in the future? Wildlife Preservation Canada is planning for a similar workshop in the Carden area in fall 2017. Get in touch if you’d like to be kept informed!