



HOME ON THE RANGE

SPRING 2020



Part of the 2019 WPC Loggerhead Shrike team, happy after a morning of banding captive-bred juveniles at our field site near Napanee, Ontario.

2019 Season in Review

It has certainly been an interesting year for the loggerhead shrike recovery team! Eighteen wild breeding pairs were found this season in eastern Canada (Ontario and Quebec), which is around the same number of pairs that were spotted in 2018. While almost all breeding pairs were found in Ontario, this was the first time that a breeding pair has been confirmed in Quebec since 2010!

The eighteen pairs fledged at least thirty-four wild young, and at least 36% of all birds spotted in the wild originated from the captive-breeding and release program. Fifteen wild loggerhead shrikes were banded this year, which left only a third of the wild shrike population unbanded by the end of the season. Higher proportions of banded birds will help field staff track individuals more accurately, so that the recovery team can gain a better understanding of breeding territories, individual movements, and population size.

In the captive-breeding program, the recovery team had a less successful year than the last, with only sixty-four juvenile shrikes

released into the wild (compared to 130 in 2019). As with any research program that cares for living animals, there were a few sad and unexpected losses, which lowered the final number of juvenile releases for the season. Several adults died in the spring before breeding began, which is a rare occurrence that the recovery team does not expect to see next year.

Despite the low number of breeding pairs, within-season fledgling survivorship was the highest the team had seen since 2014! Of the sixty-four young that were released, ten were fitted with radio tags, to be tracked on the Motus Wildlife Tracking System. A portion of the tags that were deployed have a longer battery life (ten months compared to five months), so the team is hopeful that the released young's movements can be tracked during spring migration as well as the fall migration. Our conservation-breeding program continues to support the wild population, as over a third of all birds spotted in the wild were captive bred.

Once again, our thanks go out to all the landowners and volunteers who helped out with the loggerhead shrike recovery program this year. Together, we continue to work towards the recovery of this amazing species!



An adult Loggerhead Shrike perching on barbed wire, a suitable material on which to impale uneaten food items. Photo: L. Kirtley.

Taking a Stab at it

By Jane Hudecki



What makes the recovery team so thrilled to work with a bird like the loggerhead shrike? Spirited personalities aside, loggerhead shrikes exhibit a very fascinating behaviour—they impale their prey!

A Unique Behaviour

Shrikes are surprisingly unique songbirds: though not technically considered birds of prey, these sit-and-wait predators hunt all sorts of small animals like field crickets, mice, frogs, and snakes. They will often impale uneaten prey items on barbed wire and thorny shrubs like hawthorn bushes, giving them the suitable nickname of “butcher bird”.

The behaviour is thought to serve several purposes, including acting as a larder of food for nestlings and a territorial display

to attract mates and mark home range boundaries. This year, researchers and volunteers across North America reported some very interesting items that were left impaled in the field...

Bringing Home the Bacon

Researchers are often very interested when they come across uncommon prey items in a shrike’s larder (amidst the usual mice and crickets), especially if it is something as tasty as a piece of bacon!

Field researchers in Port Allen, Louisiana, were astounded when they observed a resident loggerhead shrike ‘catch’ a piece of fully-cooked bacon that had been discarded in the parking lot of a hotel. The shrike flew to a nearby Crepe Myrtle tree and proceeded to impale its ‘prey’ on a branch.

Loggerhead shrike researchers across North America were incredibly excited about the news, since the observation represented the first recorded case of a loggerhead shrike incorporating a human food item into its larder.

The observation raised many questions among the shrike research community, namely: how often do loggerhead shrikes impale human food items? Are there any other human items that shrikes interact with, or incorporate into their larders?

Plastic Food

In March of 2019, an adult loggerhead shrike was observed impaling what appeared to be an inchworm on some barbed

wire in Birmingham, Alabama. The impaled item remained unchanged and uneaten for several weeks though, which caused observers to take a closer look and realize that this “inchworm” was in fact a piece of plastic.

Unlike the piece of bacon (though not incredibly healthy for shrikes), this larder item raised some concerns over the impact of human-related objects in shrike habitats. There have been overwhelming accounts of birds ingesting plastic, and this inchworm look-a-like could fool the keenest of hunters!

Adaptation in a Human Environment

Observations like these certainly show that loggerhead shrikes are learning to adapt in increasingly human environments. It makes the surveying and monitoring performed by researchers and volunteers across the continent all the more important.

In Ontario, spring migration is around the corner, and loggerhead shrikes could be returning as early as the end of March. If you see a shrike, the loggerhead shrike recovery team at Wildlife Preservation Canada wants to know about it.

Send sighting details and photos to:

birds@wildlifepreservation.ca

or call 519-836-9314 / 1-800-956-6608



Have you ever seen an impaled food item on a tree or fence?

You can contribute your data to the Loggerhead Shrike Working Group by submitting pictures to the Larder Locker, on iNaturalist:

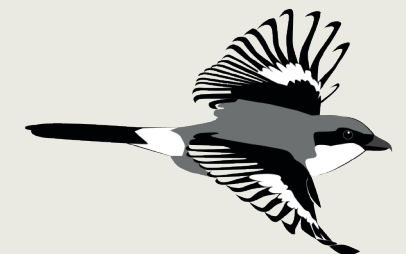
[inaturalist.org/projects/larder-locker-north-american-shrike-caches](https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/larder-locker-north-american-shrike-caches)

Always be sure you keep a respectful distance from birds and their nests.



Above: Bacon-wrapped Crepe Myrtle tree in Port Allen, Louisiana, courtesy of a resident Loggerhead Shrike. Photo: A. Worm and T. Boves.

Below: A piece of plastic resembling a juicy inchworm, impaled on barbed wire fencing in Birmingham, Alabama. Photo: M. Reynolds.



LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE WORKING GROUP

The Loggerhead Shrike Working Group is online! The site is a place to find information on the species, the research being conducted, and the latest news from across the species’ range.

Check us out at loggerheadshrike.org



Go digital

Sign up to receive the latest shrike news directly to your inbox. We'll send you an electronic version of this newsletter instead of paper, along with other updates live from the field. Sign up for electronic updates: wildlifepreservation.ca/shrike-news



Join the team

Join the effort to save one of Canada's most endangered songbirds with a donation today. You can make a gift towards the shrike chicks born this spring by visiting: wildlifepreservation.ca/donate

About the project

Eastern loggerhead shrikes are one of Canada's most endangered songbirds. In the past, they could be found from Manitoba to New Brunswick. Now, the population is restricted to two small isolated pockets in Ontario.

Since 2003, Wildlife Preservation Canada has been responsible for coordinating and implementing the recovery program in Ontario. The conservation breeding program was the first in the world to see a captive-bred migratory songbird return from migration and breed in the wild.

Today, up to a third of the wild population was born in captivity, and independent studies have concluded that without our intervention, the eastern loggerhead shrike might have been lost by now. However, there is still more work to be done to identify and address the causes of the species' decline.

Species recovery is a team effort. This project wouldn't be possible without the collaboration of the following partners:

African Lion Safari
Canadian Wildlife Service - Environment and Climate Change Canada
Couchiching Conservancy
Little Ray's Nature Centres
Mountsberg Raptor Centre - Conservation Halton
Nashville Zoo at Grassmere
The Nature Conservancy of Canada
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Ontario Parks
Private landowners
Queen's University
Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute - National Zoo
Toronto Zoo
York University
And all members of the Loggerhead Shrike Working Group



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