

Adopt-A-Site Program 2023 Summary



The Adopt-A-Site Program (AAS) has been engaging volunteers to help locate shrikes throughout their range in Ontario since 2012. The Eastern Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus migrans*) was designated Endangered in Canada in 1991, and in Ontario in 1992. Since 2003, Wildlife Preservation Canada has been leading the recovery effort for this species, and volunteer participation in the AAS Survey is a direct and vital contribution to these efforts. While surveying for shrikes, volunteers also record the presence of a subset of birds, including a number of grassland species-at-risk, and these data are submitted to the province each year through the Natural Heritage Information Centre.



Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) Photo: H. Hess 2023



Five Loggerhead Shrike nestlings Photo: H. Hess 2023

This year, 35 volunteers surveyed 137 sites across five of the core areas (Carden, Napanee, Smiths Falls, Grey-Bruce and Pembroke/Renfrew). Between April 16th and July 9th, over 171 hours of surveys were completed! Volunteers found our main target, the Loggerhead Shrike, at two sites (both in Carden), during the course of regular surveys (1.5% of all sites surveyed), and one on a neighbouring site. Shrikes at one of the sites were found to be a breeding pair, which was associated with a nest that was monitored over the field season. This site unfortunately did not produce fledglings; it failed at the egg stage due to high winds destroying the nest.

Sixteen pairs of Loggerhead Shrike were confirmed by the WPC team in Eastern Canada this season; 11 in Napanee, 5 in Carden. One Napanee “pair” was in fact a triad of birds with two females! Twelve of the pairs were successful in fledging young, producing at least 37 fledglings! Additional birds were reported on eBird in Smiths Falls, Erieau, Leamington, Quebec and even near Halifax, which continues to highlight the importance of conducting surveys in as many locations as possible.

The Eastern Meadowlark, a federally and provincially threatened species, was yet again the most commonly found species-at-risk (present on

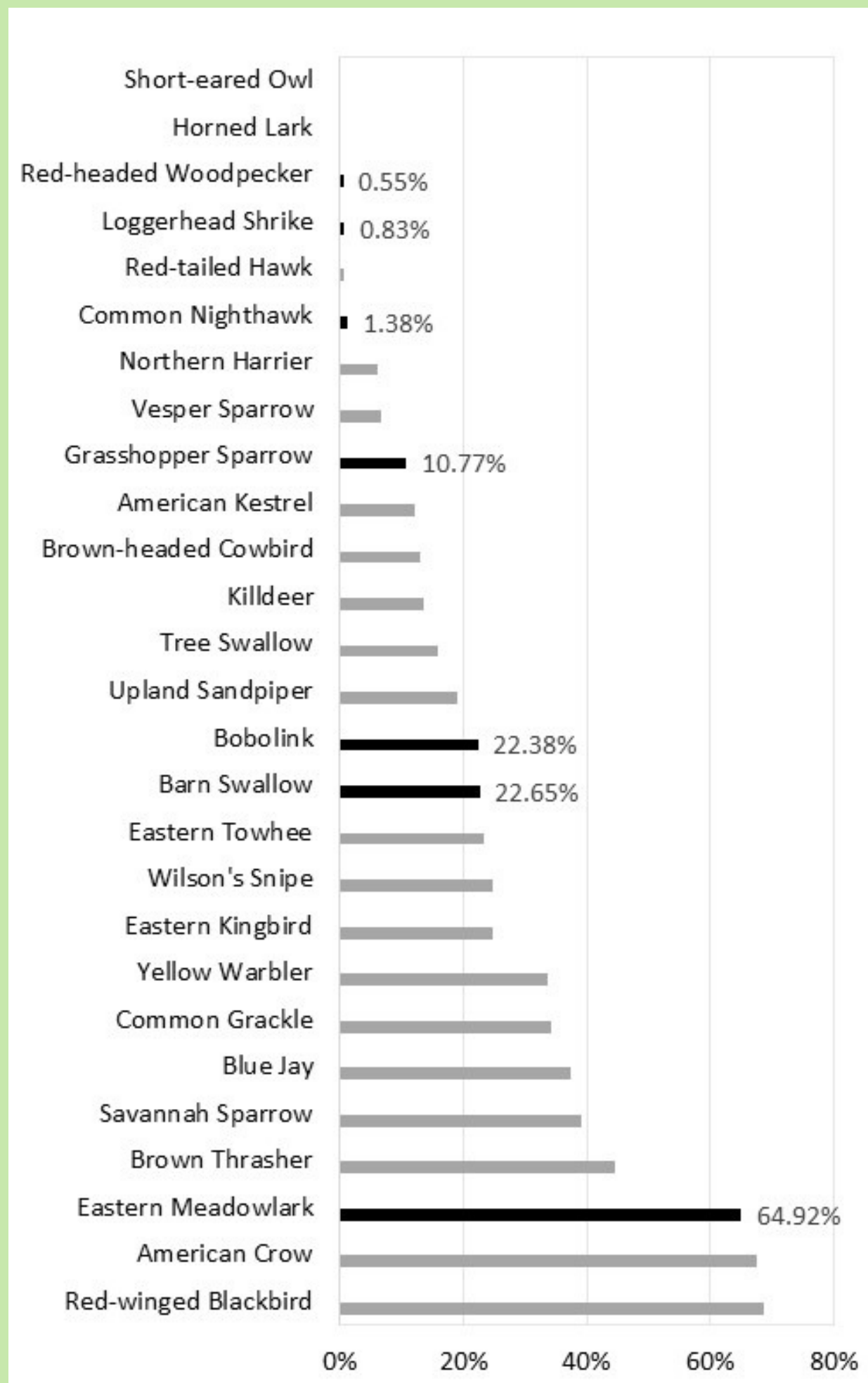
65% of surveys), which is a trend we've seen since the beginning of the AAS program. Red-winged Blackbirds (69%) were the most common bird across all sites this year, with American Crows (67%) following close behind.

Barn Swallows, which are also provincially and federally at-risk, were observed on 23% of surveys. Other species-at-risk observed included Bobolinks (22%), Grasshopper Sparrows (11%), Common Nighthawks (1%) and two Red-headed Woodpeckers. No Short-eared Owls were observed this year.

The most target species seen during any individual site survey was 17 (out of a possible 27)! The highest count came from a large site in the Carden core that surrounds a gravel quarry. This site is encircled by vast, high quality conservation and ranch lands, making it prime habitat for many grassland species. Species-at-risk observed on this site included Grasshopper Sparrows, Barn Swallows, Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks. Only 13% of volunteer surveys conducted across Ontario noted sightings of 10 or more target grassland species.

Conducting roadside surveys of large sites has challenges, and getting on-site data is always more valuable. If any volunteers have established relationships with landowners that might be willing to allow access for surveys, then please let us know!

Our sincere gratitude goes out to all who participated in the Adopt-A-Site Program this year! Volunteer involvement is crucial to broadening our search efforts, locating all shrike that return to Ontario, and identifying as much breeding habitat for shrike in the province as possible. With your help, we will continue to work towards protecting these important grassland ecosystems for future generations, avian and human alike.



Percentage of surveys where target species were observed by AAS volunteers (black bars and data labels indicate Species at Risk)



Adult male Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) Photo: H. Hess 2023



To participate in the program this year, if you spot a shrike or if you have any questions or comments, contact:

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