

NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS



## Recognition for **Eastern Loggerhead Shrike** Recovery Volunteers

Wildlife Preservation Canada hosted the annual dinner in Kirkfield on 24 August 2011 to recognize volunteer and landowner involvement in the recovery of Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes in the Carden Alvar area. By Dan Bone

I was there, along with other birders and OFO members, because of my Grassland Bird Survey work. Many local landowners also attended; some of them (we all hoped) to receive Gold Pins recognizing that they had a breeding pair of Loggerhead Shrikes on their properties for the first time. Recognition dinners were also held in Dyers Bay and Napanee.

Although Wildlife Preservation Canada (WPC) held the dinner to thank volunteers such as me, I went there to thank them, to show my solidarity with the staff. The last few years have been an uphill battle for them, with disappointing results despite much hard work and good planning. I went to this event to be with them, to encourage them to continue this

- Convention
- **9** OFO Certificates of Appreciation OFO 2010 Financial Statements
- **10** A Golden-crowned **Experience: Hosting** a Rarity
- 12 Taxonomic Update: 52nd Supplement to the AOU Checklist
- 13 Book Reviews
- **14** Recent OFO Retirees
- 15 Photo Quiz

## **Ontario Field Ornithologists**

Box 116 Station F Toronto ON M4Y 2L4 OFO Website: www.ofo.ca Email: ofo@ofo.ca

vital research. Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes are teetering on the brink of extirpation in the Carden area and recovery efforts must continue so that these unique songbirds will have an opportunity to bounce back if given a few good years of favourable conditions. And we are not even sure what those favourable conditions might be. What makes these birds choose some areas and not others? What happens on the wintering grounds, and where are the wintering grounds anyway? There is so much to learn.

The event started at 4:45 p.m. with an optional tour of the Carden Shrike Field Breeding and Release site on the Turnbull property, now with a conservation easement limiting land usage. I couldn't attend this year but I am told that everything is much the same as last year when I did attend, except that the staff have a new trailer, donated by the Turnbulls, to increase living quarters. About 20 people signed up this year to see the cages built around real hawthorn trees in a real cow pasture with real cows and a bull in typical alvar habitat (i.e. poison ivy and cow patties everywhere). Viewing was limited to within 100 metres of the cages in keeping with the field work protocol designed to limit habituation and stress on the breeding pairs and fledglings. Binoculars and telescopes were available and provided good views of the birds. Over at the food shed there

were close-up looks at live mealworms, crickets and mice. This food is for the shrikes, of course, and is presented to the birds in special feeding bins. Don't know what the field workers ate but it wasn't likely as fresh as this. When I was there we asked lots of questions of the field workers and got lots of good answers. I wanted to ask the staff about living in close quarters in a small house in the woods with questionable water and limited electricity but I was too polite. It would make a good reality TV show I would imagine.

At 6:00 p.m. the cash bar opened back at the Lions Club hall. Birders got to meet landowners and the city folk mixed with the rural residents. Jean Iron and Eleanor Beagan were there and I had a good chat with a couple that own the property on the corner of Kawartha Lakes Rd. 48 and Prospect Rd. We didn't actually have a square dance but it felt like it.









Clockwise from left:

Carden Shrike Field Breeding and Release facility staff: Angela Capelle, Alex MacPhail, detail of Angela banding a shrike.

Photos by Janice Lapierre

Loggerhead Shrike captive breeding cages at Turnbull Ranch, Carden Alvar. Photo by Jean Iron Appreciation Dinner guests viewing captive bred Loggerhead Shrikes at Turnbull Ranch.

Photo by Jean Iron







## There were 37 wild fledglings this year in Carden compared to 39 in 2010 so there is still a very good chance of reversing the downward slide...

Shortly after 7:00 p.m. the buffet opened, catered by the Kirkfield Lions Club. It was good, country fare and the choice of beef as the entree was very appropriate (demanded almost) considering the close relationship between cattle ranching and Loggerhead Shrike habitat.

As the main course was winding down, Tara Imlay, the Species Recovery Biologist for WPC, introduced the Carden field workers who took turns reporting on the season's activities and results. They stood, all in a row, a little nervous, casually elegant and so very young. They were turned out in relative finery, given that I usually saw them in field fatigues at 7:30 in the morning. For me, one of the perks of doing volunteer work is to meet these young members of the recovery team and help them solve problems. As an old retired teacher I miss the staff room banter and being part of a team. This helps. They remind me of the energetic, optimistic, student teachers I used to mentor. And these young people lead such interesting — albeit uncertain — lives, jetting from jungle to boreal forest, to Texas scrub to Alaskan muskeg as the field work contracts change.

Angela Capelle outlined the breeding flock data: 12 pairs, 10 of which bred; six of these produced second clutches. Over all, they had successful breeding but the numbers were down.

Alex MacPhail informed us of the concerns regarding breeding flock mortality of the young and adults that started in past years and continued this season. The causes are uncertain and cage modifications and rearing practices are being tweaked and considered by WPC staff and experts from the Toronto Zoo and the Ontario Veterinary College. Some of this year's young were selectively kept back for

breeding stock instead of being released. This has been a plus as it has bolstered the genetics of the breeding flock in areas where the breeding lines were under represented.

Janet Lapierre, all sparkly despite repeated bouts with poison ivy, gave us the results of the wild breeding pairs. Janet is the WPC field biologist for the Carden area this year. Hard to be sparkly and optimistic when reporting that only 13 pairs were found breeding in the wild this year, down from 17 last year and 18 the vear before. No landowners received gold pins this year as there were no new nesting sites on private property. But there were 37 wild fledglings this year in Carden compared to 39 in 2010 so there is still a very good chance of reversing the downward slide if we/they get some breaks in research and in the weather. And WPC didn't get any research breaks this year. Forty-three geolocaterequipped birds were released in Ontario (24 in Carden) in 2010 and 49 the year before (42 in Carden). One of these birds returned this spring and, like last year's two returnees, after recapture, the geolocater was found to have malfunctioned and only two months of data, covering only the initial stages of migratory movements, was retrieved. To her credit, Elaine Williams, executive director of WPC operations, did not stand on her chair and curse the research gods at the top of her lungs. Somebody should have. Can't WPC catch a break? The geolocaters were supposed to record the time and date of every sunrise and sunset from which latitude and longitude could be calculated thereby revealing where the birds had spent the winter. We need to know where the Carden birds spend the winter. Winter habitat could be one of the problems.

## Landowners are being financially rewarded for Loggerhead Shrike nests on their properties.



Adult wild Loggerhead Shrike, Carden Alvar. Photo by Jean Iron

Seven Loggerhead Shrikes were released at Carden this year: five were Carden hatched birds and two were hatched in Dyers Bay and transported here for release. Four of these birds were equipped with geolocaters and are identified by silver over red bands on the left leg with nothing on the right leg. We need lots of volunteers to find these birds if they return next spring in mid April.

There is speculation that the birds may be pecking at the devices or it could just be bad luck as 20% of the devices have proven to fail anyway. No one knows for sure but WPC is investigating possible causes over the winter.

Janet finished by thanking the volunteer birders and landowners for their support. She added that the support is appreciated every year but this year it was especially important to the WPC staff because of the less than stellar results. It was heartfelt.

Tara Imlay will release the official report for the 2011 season soon. Watch for it on the OFO website or the WPC website where you can also read the 2010 release.

Some interesting and positive news came from Ron Reid, Carden Program Coordinator at Couchiching Conservancy, the organization that manages the Cameron Ranch. Landowners are being financially rewarded for Loggerhead Shrike nests on their properties. The Gosling Project, new this year, rewards landowners having breeding shrikes on their property by paying \$20 per acre for shrike habitat occupied. Using the Ministry of Natural Resources protocol of a 400 metre radius around a nest tree, a landowner with all of the circle falling on his or her land and all of it suitable habitat could potentially receive \$2,000. Usually, the circle fell on two or more properties. With 13 nests, this involved about 25 properties with four of them being public lands such as the Cameron Ranch. Of the remaining landowners, four were quarry operators leaving about 15 regular landowners, most of them farmers, that could be offered funds. Five of these landowners have applied and taken advantage of the Gosling Project funds this year. Payments have ranged from \$200 to \$1,600. Funds not used this year will be carried over into 2012. Ron offered the quarry operators compensation, just to keep things fair, but so far they have not made application.

Ron set up a committee of local landowners to plan the distribution of the \$12,000.00 provided by the benefactor, Phillip Gosling of Guelph, Ontario. Two of these farmer advisors had had breeding shrikes in other years, and as it turned out, there was no conflict of interest in 2011 because the shrikes did not nest on their properties this season. Ron Reid pointed out that similar payments for ecological services are made in other countries: in China for removing steep hillsides from production and replacing the crops with trees and in the United States for taking marginal land out of production to create conservation reserves or set-asides. In the case of Carden, the funds are to support the continuation of beef farming, as the pastures are fundamental to Loggerhead Shrike habitat and many beef farmers are decreasing the size of their herds or getting out of the business entirely.

The door prize draw took place as we maneuvered around the side table for the perfect piece of pie. At stake was a gorgeous photo of an Eastern Loggerhead Shrike, photographed and donated by Larry Kirtley. Paul Laver, a local good guy, won it. There is much appreciation and affection for Paul amongst the WPC field staff. In March and April, when it can be cold and windy, they bunk in at the Laver residence, and later, when they move into the little house in the woods at the Breeding Field Site, Paul shows up with his tools to fix any manner of problems.

Maybe Paul should have a look at those geolocaters. He's pretty handy and we sure need them.

See you on the alvar next April... viewing lots of Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes.

Dan Bone is the OFO representative on the Carden Alvar Advisory Committee