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spot a
shrike,
help
save a
species

French rabbit TO THE RESCUE

by Julie Stauffer

For the shrike recovery project, 2008 got off to a rocky start. Severe budget cuts to Environment Canada last year left us with no federal funding commitments beyond March 31, 2008, putting our captive breeding and release program in jeopardy.

“Breeding season was just around the corner, but we had no funding in sight to cover food for the birds or to hire staff to look after them,” explains Elaine Williams, Executive Director of Wildlife Preservation Canada.

It was therefore an enormous relief when BOISSET Wines - the shrike recovery program’s largest private sector sponsor - stepped into the breach. The maker of French rabbit wines had already donated \$320,000 through the LCBO’s Natural Heritage Fund towards new shrike overwintering facilities and the breeding and release program.

In light of our funding crisis, BOISSET generously let us reallocate a portion of that money to launch our season. Furthermore, they’re committing additional funds to the recovery effort from sales of their newly released French rabbit “petit” (250ml Tetra Pak), with each purchase made by Ontario consumers.

The donation is just one example of BOISSET’s environmental leadership, which includes pioneering the use of Tetra Pak containers for their vintage wines. This packaging helped in dramatically reducing energy use, waste, and pollution. French Rabbit is the most successful wine ever launched in the history of the LCBO and this success has directly benefited shrike recovery. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)

“We take great pride in knowing our success is helping to save the eastern loggerhead shrike,” says Jean-Charles Boisset, owner of BOISSET Wines and Spirits, makers of French Rabbit wines, shown left, presenting a cheque to Elaine Williams, centre.



CARDEN CONSERVATION

Problem: Mistrust and conflict between different groups on the Carden Plain

by Julie Stauffer

Solution: The Integrated Carden Conservation Strategy

Midway between Orillia and Lindsay stretch the grasslands and cattle pastures of Ontario's Carden Plain. This globally rare alvar ecosystem attracts an extraordinary range of species, including Eastern Loggerhead Shrike - and stakeholders that haven't always seen eye to eye.

On one hand, there are the conservationists. Over the past five years the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Couchiching Conservancy, and other organizations have acquired more 5,000 acres of alvar here.

At the same time, the Carden Plain is an important source of aggregates. Quarries here, strategically located near the GTA, supply a hungry construction industry with the crushed stone and gravel essential to its needs.

Then there are the private landowners and cattle ranchers worried about their livelihoods and their property values. How will species at risk laws affect the way they live and operate? How will more eco-tourism affect their privacy, liability, cattle movements, and property rights?

It's a situation ripe for hostility and conflict.

Enter the *Integrated Carden Conservation Strategy* (ICCS). The brainchild of Wildlife Preservation Canada, the Couchiching Conservancy, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, it's an initiative to coordinate conservation activities while acknowledging the concerns and contributions of private landowners and the aggregate industry.

"We have to realize that everyone - conservationists, the aggregate industry, and private landowners and ranchers - all have a legitimate stake in the Carden Plain,"

explains Elaine Williams, Executive Director of WPC. "While our primary interests may differ, all these parties play a critical role in protecting the natural heritage values of the area, including habitat for species at risk."

Last November, a public forum brought the different parties together. The question on the table: *How can we better protect the natural heritage and species at risk on the Carden Plain while bringing greater benefits to private landowners and the local community?*

Everyone who attended praised the open information sharing and non-confrontational approach. "What has

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About the Project

In May of 2003, Wildlife Preservation Canada signed a Conservation Agreement with Environment Canada - Ontario Region, making WPC responsible for coordinating and implementing the recovery action plan of the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike in Ontario.

For More Information

To learn more about the recovery action plan, email <info@shrike.ca> or visit <www.shrike.ca>. You can also contact Wildlife Preservation Canada toll-free at 1-800-956-6608 or via email at <admin@wildlifepreservation.ca> or by writing to RR#5, 5420 Highway 6 N., Guelph, ON N1H 6J2.

Project Partners

Bird Studies Canada • Canadian Cattlemen's Association • Environment Canada • Nature Conservancy Canada • Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources • Toronto Zoo • Wildlife Preservation Canada • Over 250 Ontario Landowners • Numerous Local Naturalist Groups • and more to come!

CARDEN CONSERVATION

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really impressed me in the process of developing this strategy is the successful effort we made to include the participation of the full spectrum of landowners and land interests from the Carden community,” says Doug Van Hemessen, Stewardship Coordinator of the Victoria Land and Water Stewardship Council.

The forum sparked constructive discussions, broke down barriers, and brought people together to create solutions. “The interest and initiative is now in place to continue working together for mutually acceptable solutions,” says Anne Guiot, a senior planner at Skelton, Brumwell & Associates Inc. and consultant to The Miller Group.

In follow-up meetings, participants came up with specific strategies and actions. Ultimately, the goal is to develop an ecosystem-based approach to land stewardship - one that will protect many species at risk while boosting community involvement and attracting new partners in conservation.

Already, some ideas are being implemented. A code of conduct promoting ethical behaviour for birding in Carden will be printed once local landowners and ranchers have endorsed it. A birding blind is planned that will attract birders to conservation land rather than private properties.

A “Safe Harbour” agreement is also in the works. This concept encourages private land stewardship by ensuring that future land uses will not be prohibited if a species at risk takes up residence on a property that has been improved.

While we’re not done yet, the ICCS is already having an impact. Indeed, if all goes well, it could become a model for communities across Canada grappling with similar conservation issues.



Elaine Williams of WPC, third from left, participating in public meetings.

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Thanks to BOISSET, WPC will be able to run both the Dyer’s Bay and Carden field breeding sites this season, allowing 24 pairs of shrikes to breed in large field breeding enclosures. Four avicultural interns have been hired and trained, and they have been busy working with WPC Species Recovery Biologist, Jessica Steiner, to prepare the enclosures for the arrival of the birds in the last week of April.

Our newly hired biologist Zoe Lebrun-Southcott will be surveying for shrikes and monitoring breeding pairs in Carden this year and Kurt Hennige will be doing the same in Napanee. We also plan to expand on last year’s radio-telemetry study to determine post-release survival, dispersal, and migration behaviour of our released juvenile shrikes.

“French rabbit really is a friend in need,” says Williams. “Thanks to their generosity and vision, we can keep building on our successes in our efforts to re-establish a healthy shrike population in Ontario.”

INTRODUCING ZOE LEBRUN-SOUTH CARDEN BIOLOGIST

by Zoe Lebrun-Southcott

As spring migration begins, a number of Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes are already hurriedly making their way to the Carden Alvar, one of two remaining breeding grounds for the species in Ontario. Although little is known about their wintering grounds, the breeding grounds are becoming well known territory for program staff. I have recently joined WPC and am thrilled to be the field biologist for the 2008 shrike recovery effort in Carden, where I will be monitoring the wild population and supervising the captive breeding and release program at the Carden site.

Shrikes are often faithful to their breeding grounds and will return to the same territory to breed. Unlike the wild shrikes who will be returning to a familiar place, Carden is a new area to me and one that I am excited to get a glimpse of as soon as winter shows some sign of relenting.

Although working in Carden will be a new experience, tracking endangered birds is not unfamiliar territory for me. I have watched, hidden behind sand dunes, as piping plover chicks hatch and quickly begin to run along the beach towards the water. I have also followed the struggles of the severely endangered black-capped vireos in Texas as their nests are repeatedly parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds and they desperately try to re-nest and raise a clutch of young.

Despite some of the unappealing aspects of this type of

work - the early mornings, the bug bites and bramble scars, the frustrations of trying to improve the situation for these species - there are indescribable moments that more than compensate. Catching sight of black-capped vireo fledglings that have survived despite the odds and watching as young piping plovers make their first attempts to fly are just a couple that I have experienced.

The shrike program in Carden has already seen great success with four captive-bred birds returning to the area to breed with wild shrikes since 2005. Taking part in a program that is having immediate success in species recovery is very exciting for me since so many endangered species are facing increasingly desperate situations.

In mid-April, when our field season set-up begins, I will be joined by two interns who will mainly be responsible for the day-to-day care and monitoring of the captive pairs. The three of us will share a small cabin for the following four months. As I read through last year's field season reports I can't help but smile at some of the anecdotes that are included, such as the pesky porcupines who stole their way into the feed shed, wreaking havoc, the racket of the starlings that nested in the cabin, and the bull who was threatened by his own reflection in the cabin window. This season will no doubt be full of its own surprises and stories - all part of 'living in the field'. Most importantly though, we will be doing everything we can in order to send another large group of young shrikes off into the wild.



Zoe and a Cooper's Hawk