

**MEDIA RELEASE:**

**Nest Discovery Major Landmark in Efforts to Save Endangered Bird: Captive Breeding Program Pays Off**

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**City of Kawartha Lakes, ON** – The discovery of a female Eastern Loggerhead Shrike tending a nest with five young on the Carden Plain was cause for conservationists working on the recovery of this critically endangered songbird to break out the champagne.

The sighting of this particular bird on the May 30th was the first proof that shrikes born in captivity from captive parents do survive in the wild, do know how and where to migrate, and can successfully enter the wild breeding population.

“This is great news for shrike recovery efforts,” said Elaine Williams, Executive Director of **Wildlife Preservation Canada (WPC)**, a registered charity involved in the recovery of the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike in Ontario. “It’s very exciting for the communities of landowners who are the heart of the recovery program.”

This is one of the first projects in the world where a captive-bred migratory songbird has been released and returned to successfully breed with the wild population the following season.

Once a comparatively common songbird in Canada, the past half-century has seen the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike population steadily decline. In 1997, when only 18 wild pairs could be located, the federal government established a captive population in order to preserve the unique genetic diversity of the Canadian populations, acting as a safety net against extinction, and to boost the wild population.

This female was raised in a specially-designed field propagation and release cage located on a farm on the upper Bruce Peninsula last year. She and her two siblings were banded and released in August, along with fifteen other captive-bred shrikes. Her sighting has proven the value of the captive propagation and release program and efforts by landowners throughout grassland areas in Ontario to provide habitat for this unique bird that hunts insects and mice, and occasionally smaller birds, and often impales them on a hawthorn or barbed wire.

“It was such a thrill to realize that I was looking at the nest of a captive-bred shrike,” said Letitia McRitchie, the WPC field biologist who first spotted the nest and used coloured bands on the bird’s legs to identify her origin. “We were excited last fall when the Long Point Bird Banding Station caught another of the captive-bred shrike in a mist net, a month

after it had been released on the Bruce Peninsula, proving that captive-bred birds instinctively know how to migrate south. Now to see one breeding is an incredible feeling.”

The parents of this captive-bred female were also bred in captivity. However, her paternal grandfather and maternal grandparents were wild hatchlings collected in 1998 from farms on the Napanee Plain, and her paternal grandmother was a wild hatchling collected in 1997 from a farm on the Carden Plain, thanks to the cooperation of the landowners.

“The importance of the support of these local landowners and hundreds of other individuals and organizations who participate in the recovery program for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike cannot be underestimated or overstated,” said Robert Wenting, Environment Canada’s lead for the recovery of this species.

The importance of this one particular female also goes beyond her migration and breeding success. She provided researchers with a feather which will be tested for stable isotopes to help pinpoint the location of wintering grounds for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike in the United States, which still remains unknown.

In Ontario, the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike recovery program is a community-based partnership that includes landowners, stakeholders such as the cattle and aggregate industries, land trusts, naturalist groups, corporate supporters, foundations, Environment Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association, Wildlife Preservation Canada, Bird Studies Canada, and the Toronto Zoo, all working to meet the recovery goal of establishing 500 pairs of shrike in the wild.

The results of this partnership have been very encouraging. Across Ontario, last year, twenty-seven pairs of wild shrikes successfully fledged 80 young and thirteen captive pairs produced 53 young, of which 34 were released to the wild. Since 2001, when this part of the recovery program began, a total of 56 captive-bred birds have been released to the wild in Ontario.

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**For further information, please check out the website for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike – [www.shrike.ca](http://www.shrike.ca)**

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**Still digital images of the captive-bred female shrike taken last weekend are available.**