

Frequently Asked Questions by Owners of Shrike Habitat

What's so special about this bird?

The Loggerhead Shrike is a migratory bird that's unique in North America — it's the only songbird that hunts like a hawk. Unfortunately it is also a critically endangered bird whose numbers have declined drastically over the past 50 years. In recent years, less than 25 breeding pairs have been spotted in Ontario. That's why we're working so hard to save this unique bird from extirpation in Canada.

Who is involved in saving the Loggerhead Shrike?

A broad group of people and organizations is working to save the shrike, including African Lion Safari, Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service, Couchiching Conservancy, Boisset Family Estates maker of French Rabbit wines, Mountsberg Conservation Area, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Toronto Zoo, and Wildlife Preservation Canada.

Are any landowners involved?

Yes, and they are the most important part of the recovery program. Most of the shrike's known habitat is on private pasture or grazed land. Through the federal Habitat Stewardship Program, and the Ontario Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Wildlife Preservation Canada has worked with hundreds of landowners to protect and improve habitat and to raise public awareness of this recovery effort.

What should I do if I have Loggerhead Shrike on my property?

For most of the year, you can carry on with regular farm work throughout much of a shrike's territory. The most important thing is to give a wide berth to any nest trees from

April to September. Shrikes are normally not afraid of humans on farm equipment, but, like all songbirds, they are easily stressed during their breeding season. As well, if you approach a nest too frequently, the stress calls of the birds can tip off predators such as cats, hawks and crows to its location.

What can I do to make my land attractive to shrikes?

If your land is already shrike habitat, keeping it attractive to these birds simply means doing more of the same:

- Leave some thorny trees within pastures and fields and along their edges to provide nesting sites and hunting perches, or plant some if none exist.
- Maintain some thorny shrubs and barbed wire, which are important for shrikes to impale dead prey.
- Leave a few perching trees (preferably dead trees or dead branches on a large live tree), which are essential for shrikes to protect their territories and scout for food.
- Maintain the land as grassland or pasture, and don't let invasive shrubs, such as red cedar or juniper, take over. Consider mowing overgrown fields if cattle aren't pastured.
- Avoid using pesticides and herbicides whenever possible since they will reduce the prey species the birds need.
- Contact us for advice if you're thinking about making any changes to habitat.

Can I get financial help to do things that improve habitat?

Yes, you may be eligible for financial support from Wildlife Preservation Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for installing fencing or cattle watering systems, removing certain trees or shrubs and planting others, or enhancing shrike habitat in other ways.

What about other forms of support?

Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Action Groups (RAGs) have been established in some communities where our recovery efforts to date have been focused. These groups share information, organize volunteers, and work with landowners who want to maintain or restore shrike habitat. Every arrangement is an individual one-on-one partnership, worked out co-operatively, and often at the kitchen table. Participation is completely voluntary, and landowners can be as involved as they choose. Once a year, Wildlife Preservation Canada hosts a gathering, usually in the form of a barbeque or roast beef dinner, to celebrate recovery efforts that year.

Does having shrikes on my property limit my use of the land or my freedom to sell it?

It shouldn't. If you put your land up for sale, you should inform potential buyers about the shrike habitat (active nest trees) in the interests of providing "full disclosure." Should you want to sever your land or build a house, you will need to consult with your local municipality and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR).

Under the provincial Endangered Species Act (ESA), the OMNR has been applying a 400 metre setback for suitable habitat around a nesting tree. The federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) requires the federal government to identify the "critical habitat" required to maintain the existing population or to effect its recovery in the recovery strategy for the Loggerhead Shrike. Critical Habitat is based on recent nest sites (in the last 10 years) and surrounding areas of suitable grassland. Critical Habitat may change over time as additional information becomes available. Essentially, it is your responsibility to make sure you don't destroy Shrike habitat, so if you are unsure about what is OK, the safest route is to ask the OMNR. Keep in mind that if you have nesting shrikes on your property, you are already doing the right things.

For both the Species at Risk Act and the ESA, the emphasis will always be on partnership and stewardship for the protection of species at risk and their habitat.

Do I have to allow shrike biologists on my property? Bird enthusiasts?

No. It's your land. You may choose whether to allow shrike field staff to look for birds, and you can put signs up advising bird enthusiasts and other people against trespassing. Information collected by field staff is vital to the recovery of the species and we encourage cooperation and community involvement in the recovery of species at risk, but the choice is entirely yours.

Should I report shrike sightings?

Absolutely. Any sightings will help inform our recovery efforts in Canada and on the migratory grounds in the US.

Can I talk to other landowners about their experiences, both good and bad?

Certainly. We can put you in touch with both participating and non-participating landowners, landowners' associations, and stakeholder organizations. And we're happy to discuss any concerns you might have. Cooperation works because trust exists.

Can I join the recovery effort?

We'd love it! Recovery Action Groups (RAGs) in key areas of Ontario welcome involvement from landowners and volunteers. Members receive a bi-annual newsletter. Everyone who has property that is part of the territory of a breeding pair of shrikes is awarded a Gold Pin in recognition of their contribution to the recovery of this species.

How can I get more information?

For more information on the Loggerhead Shrike and/or the recovery program, please visit our website (wildlifepreservation.ca/loggerheadshrike/), or call Wildlife Preservation Canada toll-free at 1-800-956-6608.

