

Wine, Wildlife and Song: Wildlife Preservation Canada welcomes partnership to save endangered songbird

Toronto, November 12, 2005 — Wildlife Preservation Canada (WPC) is excited to announce that it is partnering with the LCBO and French winemaker Boisset to spearhead a new initiative designed to step up its activities to save the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike from extinction.

The partnership was announced at WPC's annual charity fundraising dinner and auction held at The Boulevard Club in Toronto tonight.

“We are thrilled to welcome the LCBO and Boisset as collaborators in our efforts to save the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike from disappearing forever from the grasslands of Southeastern Ontario,” said Elaine Williams, Executive Director of WPC. “The funds generated through the sale of a portion Boisset's French rabbit wines and its \$160,000 contribution to the LCBO's Natural Heritage Fund will have an enormous impact on how we are able to house the captive population of shrikes through the winter months and increase the number of pairs that will successfully breed each year in specially designed and built field breeding and release enclosures. Ultimately, this partnership will help us reach our recovery goal sooner of establishing 500 pairs in the wild by enabling us to breed and release to the wild more shrikes each year.”

An extraordinary predatory songbird, in 1997 when there were only 18 breeding pairs of the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike found in Canada, nestlings were collected from the wild to establish a captive population as a safety net against their extinction. WPC is managing an ambitious captive breeding and reintroduction program through a Conservation Agreement with Environment Canada – Ontario Region under the Species at Risk Act, a first for a non-profit organization in Canada. They have also launched an innovative habitat-stewardship program that encourages landowners to help protect and restore shrike habitat wherever possible. The program released more than 50 birds into the wild this year alone, almost doubling the number released in total since 2001.

Another success story this year was the return of one female, who having been bred in captivity by parents raised in captivity, was released into the wild last year and returned after the winter to a location 400 km further east to breed with a wild male shrike and successfully fledge young — the first proof that a shrike raised in captivity can successfully migrate, survive the winter and integrate into the wild.

“Watching these birds take off into the wild is a highlight of our recovery efforts,” said Ms. Williams. “Seeing one return and successfully raise young is hugely exciting. It gives everyone involved such a sense of optimism that one day we'll be able to take the shrike off Canada's endangered species list.”

For 20 years, the WPC has saved critically endangered species — species whose numbers in the wild are so low that a great deal more than habitat protection is required to recover them. A lean, hands-on organization based in Guelph, Ontario, it is the only national non-profit charity in Canada that focuses exclusively on species at risk and uses a three-pronged approach to recovering these critically endangered wildlife species: captive breeding, release and hands-on recovery. It is internationally recognized for species-focused conservation initiatives and its expertise in captive breeding and release programs.

“Wildlife Preservation Canada believes that *extinction is forever*,” said Ms. Williams. “The loss of any one species can damage the web of life, resulting in unexpected environmental changes that impact other species, including our own. Without urgent action, these irreplaceable animals will be gone forever.”

WPC was founded by the late Gerald Durrell, a prolific author and naturalist. He founded three independent organizations, one in the United Kingdom more than 40 years ago, one in the U. S. in 1971 and one in Canada in 1985 to ensure someone was working hard every day to save species in Canada and abroad. The group’s focus on species recovery has been proven around the world, both to save species at risk, as well as to give an identity and focus to habitat preservation efforts.

“Our programs use a ‘tool-box’ approach to tackling species recovery,” said Ms. Williams. “We identify the resources necessary to address each individual situation. Professional training, scientific field research, captive breeding, reintroduction, habitat restoration and stewardship, public education and community involvement in recovery — each is an important tool to help species to recover from the brink of extinction.”

The group focuses on:

- Species-led conservation rather than habitat-led conservation. Rehabilitation and recovery work is the only proven tool to protect the most endangered animals. In a world where habitat is increasingly fragmented, protecting a species' habitat may not be enough to save a species.
- High quality, hands-on science: Well-designed scientific research is necessary to protect and save species. Their field scientists conduct on-site research to plan effective strategies to better manage wild populations and improve habitat.
- Hands-on intervention: The group has proven skills in captive-breeding, wildlife management, re-introductions and translocations, to augment dwindling populations in reduced habitat or move animals to safer areas.
- A commitment to local scientists and educators: WPC works with very special people for whom conservation work is not a phase in their lives, but their whole lives. The group’s commitment includes providing technical back-up at training centres and on-site consultations. They recognize that local professionals are in the best position to design and direct their priority activities at the grassroots and they are the key to long-lasting conservation results.

The group is funded through private, foundation and corporate donations and depends on the funds raised at its Annual Charity Dinner and Auction to achieve its goals each year.