

# **SURVEY TO DETERMINE SPECIES AT RISK**

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If you walk the trails at Prince Edward Point this month, you will be entangled in webs and covered in spiders. Unlike May when these same trails were bustling with birders from across Ontario and Quebec, there is a noticeable stillness now, isolated sprigs of prickly ash leaning in toward the centre of the trail, the paths now thick with invasive dog strangling vine. At the banding station, bird banding will not resume for another month when volunteers will arrive to mow the net lanes and access paths preparatory to the fall season, and the daily census as part of the Migration Monitoring Network becomes active again. July and August traditionally are the months when activity, both human and bird-wise, is at its lowest ebb.

However, this summer, Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory bander in charge David Okines, is back on site after barely a month's sabbatical. His mission? To collect baseline information of those birds within the South Shore Important Bird Area (IBA) that have been identified as "species at risk." High on his list will be whip-poor-will, short-eared owl, least bittern, black tern, Henslow's sparrow and red-headed woodpecker.

A "species at risk" is any naturally-occurring plant or animal in danger of extinction or of disappearing from the province. Once classified as "at risk", they are added to the Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) List. Sometimes called the "endangered species list", the SARO list is actually much broader and during the summer David will be looking at additional high priority species in that category as well, including common nighthawk, bald eagle, loggerhead shrike and the king rail. Funded with support from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, the collection of data from the IBA will be taking place throughout this month.

The birding and banding expert explains that one of the purposes of the survey is to develop a work plan for continuing and expanding birds at risk stewardship activities beyond 2010, including additional surveys, partnership development and working with landowners to promote appropriate habitat stewardship activities that will benefit species at risk in the IBA and elsewhere in Prince Edward County.

"The South Shore Important Bird Area which includes all the area from

Royal Road south and from Point Petre east to Prince Edward Point previously supported populations of these species at risk that we are targeting. We want to clarify their current status within our IBA," says David Okines.

Field work, says Okines, will consist of passive point counts along the existing road system, but additional targeted off road surveys in priority habitats will be conducted, where landowner permission is obtained. However, much of the area included in the survey is public land and includes the Point Petre Provincial Wildlife Area, the Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area and the Ostrander Point Crown Land Block. The south shore of Prince Edward County represents one of the largest stretches of relatively undeveloped shoreline along the north shore of Lake Ontario. The area boasts significant numbers of migrating, wintering and breeding birds. A report on the breeding birds in 2000 concluded that the identified IBA is an ideal area for conservation and management practices that can enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife.

David Okines is seeking public input regarding any species in the above list that may have been observed in an effort to get a better handle on the current status to complement the work he is doing this month. The reports of sightings would ideally have the date they were seen, the number of individuals observed, and the location as near as possible (road name and civic address number would be ideal). He says the first 10 species are his priority, but would welcome sightings on species like bobolink, golden-winged warbler, eastern wood-pewee, wood thrush, bank swallow, grasshopper sparrow and field sparrow, just to name a few of the additional species in which he is interested. Sightings may be e-mailed to [davidokines@aol.com](mailto:davidokines@aol.com) . Those without e-mail can submit the information to me, and I will forward it on.

Once all the surveys have been completed and any data from the public have been incorporated into the effort, David will be summarizing his results in a detailed report. This report will include the GPS coordinates for all observations and sighting reports in a format suitable for use in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and will be incorporated in the Natural Heritage Information Centre database. With the entire south shore area facing constant development pressure, it is important that these natural heritage features be identified.