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## Partnership Program Protects Upland Bird Habitat in Southern Ontario

Ottawa, ON – Program partners, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Wildlife Habitat Canada/Wetland Habitat Fund (WHC/WHF), the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) and Environment Canada (EC) announced today the completion of another successful year of the **Landbird Habitat Program**. The *Landbird Habitat Program* is a key partnership program aimed at conserving Ontario's biodiversity, promoting stewardship, developing partnerships and community involvement all leading to a healthy natural environment for Ontarians.

In 2006, through the Ontario Wetland Habitat Fund, 14 landowner projects were initiated or completed, securing and enhancing over 270 acres of bird habitat in the specific target areas. To date, the program has undertaken 78 landowner projects resulting in over 2,400 acres of habitat being secured or enhanced. A number of projects specifically target migratory songbird and species at risk habitat enhancement and securement, while others focus on priority habitats for landbirds such as grassland or open nesting bird habitats, interior forest habitats and habitats in the Rice Lake Plains.

The 2006 field season also saw NCC working in three key areas across southern Ontario. In the Rice Lake Plains area NCC visited landowners to provide information on the importance of grassland birds and how to help protect them and their habitats. A guide to the maintenance and restoration of tallgrass prairies of the Rice Lake Plains was released featuring information on grassland birds of the area. *A Landowner's Guide for Restoring Central Ontario's Rice Lake Plains Tallgrass Prairie* was published in partnership with the Peterborough Stewardship Council and funded by the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and the *Landbird Habitat Program*. NCC and OMNR also conducted prescribed burns to restore important bird habitat. Prairie and savanna sites on the Rice Lake Plains can be encroached on by forest species including invasive trees like Scots Pine which fire helps to thin out and push back. Work in the Rice Lake Plains benefits many grassland species including endangered birds such as the Northern Bobwhite, the Barn Owl, the Loggerhead Shrike and the Henslow's Sparrow.

NCC's work on the Carden Alvar, an Important Birding Area near Lake Simcoe, included conducting breeding bird surveys, mapping nest sites and developing management plans for properties owned by NCC and its Carden Alvar partner, the Couchiching Conservancy. The management plans establish ways in which to mitigate bird threats and to improve habitat quality through restoration and maintenance. The endangered Loggerhead Shrike is one of the many birds that will benefit from the work done on the Carden Alvar.

In southwestern Ontario NCC worked on the restoration of a large farm property in order to recreate once present natural habitat for threatened species and species of special concern such as the Hooded Warbler, the Cerulean Warbler and the Louisiana Waterthrush. Restoration work, laid out under new property management plans, included preparing fields for planting, creating property buffers, planting a mix of native species, and a fall native seed collection event run through the NCC volunteer program. Work on this property will also benefit other priority bird species including the Black-throated Green Warbler, the Magnolia Warbler, the Blue-winged Warbler, the Grasshopper Sparrow and may draw back a presence of the Red-shouldered Hawk and the endangered Acadian Flycatcher.

During the 2007 field season, NCC plans to continue working in the Rice Lake Plains and Southwestern Ontario including Pelee Island, as well as expanding onto the Napanee Plain. Spring workplans include more prescribed burns, bird monitoring, invasive species control, local grassland bird education through landowner contact, workshops, various publications, and additional property management planning to identify future restoration activities.

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**Accompanying bird photographs and interview opportunities available from the Nature Conservancy of Canada.**

**For more information on the Landbird Habitat Program see attached backgrounder or contact:**

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## LANDBIRD HABITAT PROGRAM BACKGROUNDER

The *Landbird Habitat Program* is a partnership between the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada/Wetland Habitat Fund, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Canada. The Program was developed under the auspices of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

Landbirds are a diverse group of birds ranging from raptors to sparrows that inhabit grasslands, woodlands and other upland habitats. The *Landbird Habitat Program* was established in 2004 when ground-breaking analysis of bird research revealed that urgent action was needed to help conserve populations of several species of landbirds. Protecting landbirds is an important element of conserving biodiversity in Ontario; 'keeping common birds common' is the vision of the landbird group of North American Bird Conservation Initiative, the *Partners in Flight*.

The *Landbird Habitat Program* provides financial and technical assistance for private landowners who are undertaking habitat stewardship projects on their properties and also supports landbird habitat conservation efforts by partners such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Through this program there are free expert site visits and funds available for landowners who are interested in protecting and enhancing significant bird habitat in southern Ontario.

The *Landbird Habitat Program* is designed to improve the quality and quantity of habitat for birds on private lands around existing important landbird natural areas that are part of southern Ontario's Landbird Conservation Plan of NABCI. The geographic focus is on seven significant bird areas in southern and central Ontario: Pelee Island, Clear Creek Forest, South Walsingham, Skunk's Misery, Point Abino, Rice Lake Plains and the Carden Alvar. Further stewardship efforts are carried out on lands owned by conservation organizations such as NCC and its partners in those regions.

### About the Partners

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is a national non-profit conservation organization that works with landowners to protect Canada's natural habitats. Its plan of action is to build partnerships and develop creative conservation solutions with individuals, corporations, community groups, conservation groups and government bodies. Since 1962, NCC and its supporters have helped to protect more than 1.9 million acres (765,000 hectares) of ecologically significant land nationwide and over 118,000 acres in Ontario alone.

Wildlife Habitat Canada (WHC) is a national non-profit conservation organization established to conserve, restore and enhance wildlife habitat in Canada. WHC works through partnerships with communities, landowners, governments, non-government organizations, and industry to find effective solutions to complex environmental problems facing wildlife habitat. Wildlife

Habitat Canada is committed to promoting and funding wildlife habitat conservation, restoration and enhancement. In Ontario, we operate the Wetland Habitat Fund in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, providing technical and financial assistance directly to landowners. Find out more about our programs at [www.whc.org](http://www.whc.org).

Environment Canada manages wildlife matters that are the responsibility of the federal government. These include protection and management of migratory birds, nationally significant habitat and species at risk, as well as work on other wildlife issues of national and international importance. In addition, the department does research in many fields of wildlife biology and provides incentive programs for wildlife and habitat stewardship.