



How to Help

Eastern Meadowlarks

Once common in grasslands east of the Rocky Mountains, the melodious Eastern Meadowlarks have declined as their open habitats have been converted to row crops or housing developments. They need fields with thick grass and wildflower cover for nesting and foraging, and can be helped by managing pastures and grasslands to maintain adequate ground cover for nesting and foraging birds.

What Eastern Meadowlarks Need

Food: Insects make up about 75 percent of the Eastern Meadowlark's diet, including crickets and grasshoppers, caterpillars, cutworms, and grubs; the remainder is vegetable matter. It feeds almost entirely on the ground, obtaining food by gleaning from the ground surface and by probing beneath the soil surface or searching under clods, manure, etc. In winter, when insects are scarce or absent, meadowlarks eat noxious weed seeds and waste grains, supplemented to some degree by wild fruits.

Nesting: Eastern Meadowlarks maintain territories of 2-25 acres in larger open fields, preferring those with limited shrub growth and at least 90% grass and forb cover. They require scattered elevated song perches such as fence posts or low shrubs to defend territory.

Shelter: Eastern Meadowlarks roost and sleep on the ground in the cover of grasses, shrubs, and dense vegetation that make up their preferred habitat.

Other: Meadowlarks will abandon their nests if flushed from them during the eggs' incubation period. They often depend on fields managed as crops or for grazing, and are highly dependent on national and local farm policies.

How You Can Help

- Maintain grasslands and pastures with grasses and wildflowers 10 inches or higher, and limit growth of woody plants.
- On Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields, make sure to seed with wildflowers in addition to grass seeds.
- Practice no-till farming or delay plowing until spring to allow seeds to overwinter on ground for birds.
- Avoid spraying fields with pesticides that kill insects that birds eat and may harm the birds.
- On pastures, practice rotational grazing to maintain sufficient grass and wildflower cover for nesting birds.
- If possible, avoid mowing during the breeding season (usually early June to mid-August).
- Eliminate most woody vegetation from fields, but allow for scattered shrubs as song perches.
- Maintain open habitats with adequate grass cover for nesting and roosting.
- For detailed technical information on managing grasslands for meadowlarks, see the meadowlark species account at: www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/literatr/grasbird
- Avoid disturbing nesting meadowlarks by staying out of fields where they are nesting.
- Support Farm Bill policies and other incentive programs that allow farmers to maintain pastures and fields for meadowlarks and other grassland birds.