

EASTERN MEADOWLARK

Sturnella magna



Physical characteristics



The eastern meadowlark has a long, pointed beak and a short tail. It has a bright yellow belly and a black “V” on its breast. Males and females have the same plumage.



Diet



This species feeds on insects found on the ground, such as grasshoppers, crickets, and the larvae of pest moths and butterflies.

Habitat



The eastern meadowlark’s preferred habitat is hayfields. It breeds in prairies, natural grasslands, and pastures. It nests on the ground and is faithful to its nesting site.

Periods of vulnerability



- The males arrive between late March and early April, and the females follow 2 to 4 weeks later
- Egg incubation begins in the first or second week of May and lasts 13 to 15 days.
- The young remain in the nest and usually begin to fly between the end of May and the second week of June. Some remain in the nest for longer.
- Migration starts at the end of September and can last until the second week of November.



Threats



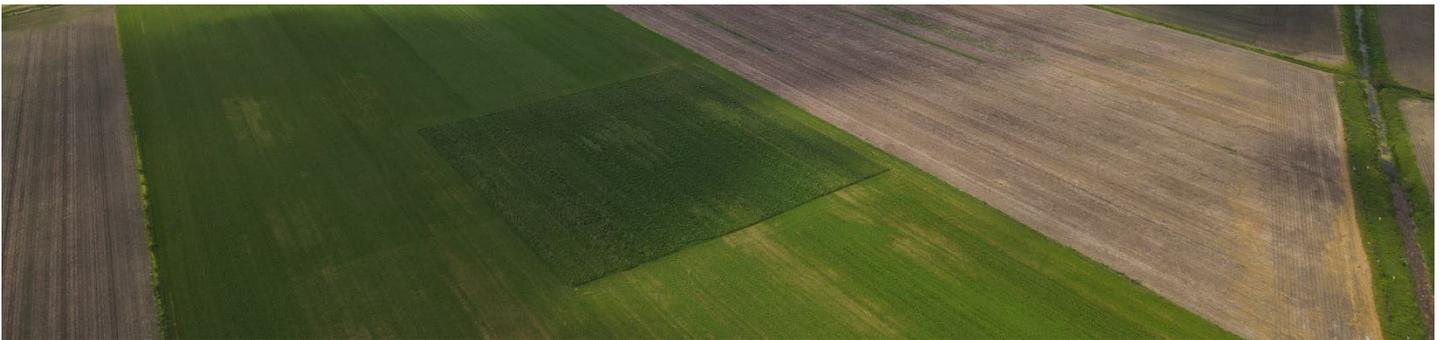
- Increased mortality rate due to early cutting, as the species nests on the ground.
- Habitat loss due to the conversion of forage crops to annual crops.
- Habitat loss due to agricultural land being abandoned and reverting back to forest.
- Habitat loss and risk of increased nestling mortality and nest destruction due to overgrazing.
- Risk of poisoning due to ingestion of pesticide-covered seeds.
- Diminished reproductive success due to the brown-headed cowbird, a brood parasitizing bird species that targets meadowlark nests.

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Sustainable practices

- Delay the first hay cutting until July 15 to avoid destroying nests (this date may vary from region to region).
- If a nest is spotted, maintain a protective buffer (around 100 metres) around it and avoid approaching the nest before July 15.
- When cutting hay, work from the inside of the field outward; this will give any birds a chance to fly away before you get to them.
- If possible, keep part of the field closed off when grazing animals.
- Rotate pastures used for grazing to avoid overgrazing in areas where the species is present.
- Preserve prairies:
 - Allow prairies to lay fallow for a long period of time before recultivating them, and rotate them so that recultivated prairies sit next to new or old prairies.
- Maintain a parcel of several hectares of grassland for at least six years. Choose an area unsuitable for field crops, such as a flood-prone area or an area with poor drainage.
- Reduce farm machinery speed to no more than 10 km/h.
- Raise cutting height to between 10 and 12 cm, particularly during the first two cuts of the season.
- Install a flushing bar equipped with small chains on the front of machinery used to do field work, especially during the nesting period (mid-May to mid-July).
- Leave land fallow when possible or recultivate fallow land by targeting areas and performing work outside breeding periods.



- As of 2023, **threatened** species listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*
- Recovery strategy for the eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) in Canada:
www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry/recovery-strategies/eastern-meadowlark-proposed-2022.html

Sources

Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). (2011). "Eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*): COSEWIC assessment and status report 2011." www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry/cosewic-assessments-status-reports/eastern-meadowlark-2011.html

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Expert review: Benoit Jobin, Patricia Désilets