

Life Cycle

Breeding: Shrikes return to Saskatchewan in late April and early May. Males set up territories and attract females by singing and posting the territory with impaled prey. Often the same territory is used year after year. A territory can vary in size from less than 4 hectares (10 acres) to greater than 16 hectares (40 acres).

Nesting: The male and female begin constructing the bulky, cup-shaped nest towards mid-May. Nests are about 13 cm in diameter and are made of twigs, grasses, forbs, and cattle hair. Nests are usually built about chest height in dense shrubs or small trees, and are strongly defended by both adults.

Eggs, incubation and chicks: In late May the female lays 5-8 eggs. Eggs are a grayish buff, with dark markings near the large end. The female incubates for 15-17 days and is fed by the male during this period. The chicks hatch about mid-June and leave the nest about early July.

Wintering: The adults and young leave Saskatchewan by about the first of September. They migrate individually, flying up to 3,000 km to their wintering grounds in southern Texas and northern Mexico.



Did you know? Late June is the best time of the year to see shrikes. The chicks are beginning to leave the nest and the adults are very active supplying food to their mobile young.

Causes For Decline

Biologists are unsure why the Loggerhead Shrike's population and range are decreasing; however, habitat loss and degradation are likely the main reasons. Agricultural practices that result in loss of grasslands, shrubs, and natural sloughs, and pesticide contamination are detrimental activities on both the breeding and wintering grounds. Also, as shrikes commonly hunt and nest in shelterbelts along roadsides, they are prone to collisions with vehicles.

How Can You Help?

Maintaining your shelterbelts in good condition and your pastures for grazing are important ways to keep Loggerhead Shrikes nesting successfully on your land. Other ways you can help:

- Protect abandoned farmsteads, which provide important nesting and hunting areas.
- Plant shrubs and trees in areas where they have been removed.
- Protect nest sites (shrubs and trees) from grazing and rubbing by cattle.
- Conserve native grassland.
- Use moderate stocking rates to conserve soil moisture, thus maximizing forage for grazing and providing suitable feeding habitat for shrikes.
- Reduce pesticide use as much as possible, particularly around nest sites.
- Learn about Loggerhead Shrikes and share your knowledge with others.
- Participate in a stewardship program like Nature Saskatchewan's **Shrubs For Shrikes!**

Give a HOOT about wildlife!

If you spot a Loggerhead Shrike, call our Toll-Free Line at 1-800-667-4668 (HOOT). Each sighting helps to monitor the shrike population.



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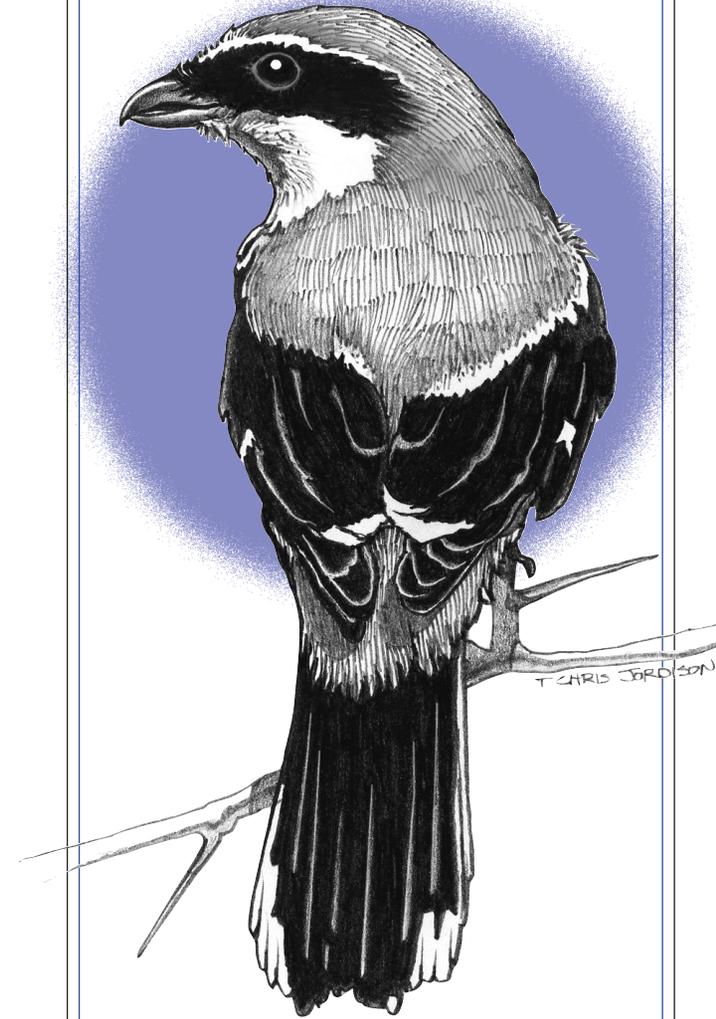


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Loggerhead Shrike

(*Lanius ludovicianus*)



Status: Threatened

What do you get when you cross a songbird and a hawk?

If this were possible, the result would be very close to a species that breeds here in Saskatchewan, the Loggerhead Shrike. Classified as a songbird, this medium-sized avian predator hunts insects, rodents, reptiles, amphibians and small birds and is often seen hunting from roadside fences and utility lines. Since the 1960s, Loggerhead Shrike numbers have declined and their range has contracted. In Saskatchewan, where most of Canada's Prairie Loggerhead Shrikes breed, the greatest declines are in the southeastern corner of the province and the Aspen Parkland region.

Did you know? Loggerhead Shrikes have large heads in proportion to their body size when compared with other birds, thus the name "loggerhead," which also means "blockhead." The "shrike" portion of the name comes from the high-pitched shriek given when the bird is alarmed.

Identification

Slightly smaller than a robin, this bird is easily identified by its gray crown and back and its white underparts that contrast with its black tail and wings. An important distinguishing feature is its wide black eye mask that extends back from its hooked bill, through and past its eyes. Flight is usually low and undulating, broken by bursts of rapid wing beats. White markings on the wings and tail are clearly visible in flight. Loggerhead Shrikes may be confused with the Northern Shrike, also found in Saskatchewan, but the Northern Shrike is larger, has finely barred underparts, and is typically seen only in winter in the southern prairies.

Did you know? Other names for the Loggerhead Shrike include thornbird, and butcherbird for their habit of impaling prey on barbed wire and thorny shrubs.



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Distribution

The Loggerhead Shrike breeds throughout the Great Plains region of North America and beyond (see map). Shrikes are migratory in the northern portion of their range, including Saskatchewan, but are year-round residents farther south. In Saskatchewan, they are found throughout the southern part of the province with the highest breeding densities in the area south and west of Saskatoon to the United States border.

Habitat

Shrikes prefer open areas for feeding with nearby shrubs or trees for nesting (particularly native thorny shrubs such as hawthorn and buffaloberry). Fencerows, shelterbelts, shrubs along streams and riparian areas, golf courses and cemeteries are also used as feeding and nesting habitat. Although shrikes are often found foraging over short vegetation, areas comprised of tall grasses (20+ cm) may be required in drier parts of its range in Prairie Canada.

Food

During the summer shrikes eat mainly insects, however they will use their strong hooked bill to eat rodents, reptiles, amphibians and small birds, particularly House Sparrows. Perched from a high vantage point, they swoop down to attack prey on the ground or in the air. Loggerhead Shrikes often impale their prey on barbed wire or thorns as a way of storing excess food, displaying hunting prowess to females, or to aid in eating large prey without the advantage of stronger talons typical of larger birds of prey such as hawks.

Did you know? Loggerhead Shrikes provide a natural pest control service to farmers: they feed extensively on insects such as grasshoppers (up to 75% of their diet) and beetles as well as rodents such as mice and voles.

Voice

Both females and males sing. In spring a bubbly musical courtship song can be heard, but shrikes are not renowned for their voice and usually emit clicks, peeps and harsh rattles. Often these song units are repeated rhythmically. When alarmed these birds shriek loudly.

Loggerhead Shrike