

# Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)

**Description:** A chunky, short-tailed bird with a black "V" on a yellow breast, the Eastern Meadowlark has a streaked brown back and white outer tail feathers. About the size of a Robin. Males and females are similar in coloration, but females are slightly smaller than males and are less strongly marked. The male Eastern Meadowlark's primary song consists of 3 to 5 (sometimes up to 8) pure and plaintive flutelike whistles all slurred together and gradually dropping in pitch, up to 2 seconds long. Male have a repertoire of songs, singing one song repeatedly for a time and then switching to a different version. They typically sing from an exposed perch, but occasionally sing in flight as well.



Photo by Karla Schmidt

**Trends:** Declining

**Habitat:** Open fields and pastures, meadows, prairies. Breeds in natural grasslands, meadows, weedy pastures, also in hayfields and sometimes in fields of other crops. Winters in many kinds of natural and cultivated fields. These birds like to stay in grasslands with good cover to protect themselves and their nests from predation. The ideal field size for this bird is something larger than six acres since they like to stay in large areas covered in their preferred grasses.

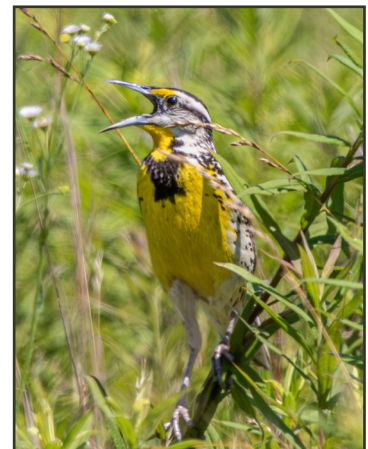


Photo by Karla Schmidt

**Ways You can help with Conservation:** The Eastern Meadowlark was once abundant over much of North Carolina's farm country. Seen perched on wires or fences, these colorful members of the blackbird family nest in fields with long grasses. Changes in farming practices, particularly the early harvest of grasses for hay, have decimated local populations.

*Farmers and landowners can support Meadowlark conservation by waiting until the birds finish nesting before mowing for hay. New Hope Bird Alliance recommends late August for hay harvest, to reduce Meadowlark chick mortality. Low intensity grazing by livestock during the nesting season may also be helpful.*



Photo by Karla Schmidt

*Advocate for less pesticide use and protection of grasslands and open pastures. Most of the Eastern Meadowlark's diet consists of insects, especially in summer, when it eats many grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and their larvae, caterpillars, ants, true bugs, and also spiders. Seeds and waste grain make up over one-fourth of the annual diet and are eaten especially in fall and winter. The main threats to Eastern Meadowlark populations are habitat loss due to development pressures. Increasing heat waves are endangering young birds in the nest. Pesticide use contributes to insect (food) declines, also harming populations of these birds.*