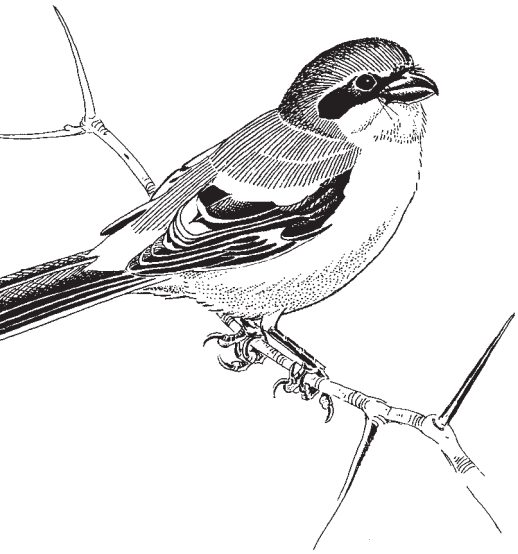
Endangered

Loggerhead shrike

Lanius ludovicianus

Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.



The Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) is a provincially endangered songbird, slightly smaller in size than the American robin. It looks and hunts like a small hawk. Loggerhead shrikes have a white underside, grey head and back, black wings with bold white markings, and a black tail with white outer tail feathers. Their most prominent feature is a narrow, black "raccoon-like" mask that extends backward from its hooked bill and through its eyes.

The Loggerhead shrike and the slightly larger Northern shrike are similar in appearance. Northern shrikes nest in northern Manitoba and are only seen in southern Manitoba during the late fall and winter when Loggerhead shrikes have departed.

Habitat

The Loggerhead shrike is found in relatively open, grassy sites. Pastured or hayed areas are preferred, near scattered trees and shrubs. They often nest in the vicinity of hedgerows or farm shelterbelts, utilizing dead treetop branches, utility wires or fences for hunting perches. Nesting territories often contain thorny shrubs or barbed wire on which food is placed for storage or to assist in tearing apart.

Depending on the quality of the habitat, Loggerhead shrike nesting territories range in size from 10 to 40 hectares (25 to 100 acres). shrikes are not alarmed by human activity, often choosing to hunt and nest in open spruce or deciduous trees in front yards, parks and golf courses, heavily grazed pastures, and along busy roads. Pastures allow for easy spotting and catching of prey. Roadsides offer abundant prey and fences and hydro lines for hunting perches.

Life History

Loggerhead shrikes arrive in Manitoba in early to mid-May. Nests are open, bulky cups made of twigs, weed stems and grasses, lined with plant materials, animal hair, fur and feathers. They are usually located 1 to 2.5 m (3 to 8 feet) above ground in semi-open shrubs or trees. Egg laying starts in mid-May with six or seven eggs being the normal clutch size for early nests. Incubation of the eggs lasts 16 to 18 days. Nestlings leave the nest at 2.5 to 3 weeks. In August or early September, young and adults begin departing separately for wintering grounds in the southern United States or Mexico.

Nesting losses are common, with predators and cool, wet weather accounting for up to half of the nests failing to raise young. It is not unusual for four or fewer young to survive beyond fledging.

The Loggerhead shrike is a carnivore, feeding on large insects such as grasshoppers and beetles. In colder weather they rely on voles and mice. When these prey items are scarce, they will take snakes, frogs or small birds.

Distribution

The Loggerhead shrike nests from southern Canada to the southern United States and Mexico. Canadian populations are at the northern periphery of the range, and can be found from southeastern Alberta, through Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and until recently, Quebec. In Manitoba, the historic range extended north beyond Swan River and into the Interlake, and east to the edge of the boreal forest. Currently, the Loggerhead shrike is primarily seen in southwestern Manitoba and around Winnipeg, with occasional sightings north to Riding Mountain National Park.

Status

The Loggerhead shrike is considered provincially rare by the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre, and globally secure by the Association for Biodiversity Information. Declines in shrike populations are due to the loss and degradation of grassland, predators, collisions with vehicles, inclement weather conditions and a shortage of insects and other prey items due to pesticide use.

Manitoba's Species At Risk

Cool Facts

Lacking the strong legs and talons of hawks and other larger carnivorous birds, Loggerhead shrikes often impale prey items on barbs, thorns, or a forked branch while tearing it apart, earning them the nickname of "butcher birds".

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An abundance of impaled or cached food in a territory during the mating season signals to prospective mates the male's hunting competence and ability to provide food for an incubating female and their eventual offspring.

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Although they are a songbird, Loggerhead shrikes rarely sing. Their song is a rather unmusical series of shrieks and grating notes.

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Many Loggerhead shrikes are killed in collisions with vehicles, because of their tendencies to hunt along roadsides, swooping in on their prey from their perch.



It is believed that increased mortality may be occurring on wintering areas in the southern United States or along migration routes.

The Loggerhead shrike is listed as Endangered by regulation 25/98 under the Manitoba *Endangered Species Act*. Nationally, it has been assessed at the subspecies level by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC); the eastern subspecies (*L. l. migrans*) has been assigned a status of Endangered, and the western subspecies (*L. l. excubitorides*) has been assigned a status of Threatened. It is also protected in Canada under the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*.

Stewardship and Recovery

A National Recovery Plan has been initiated that includes the captive breeding and release of Loggerhead shrikes. As almost all shrike nesting habitat in Canada is found on private lands, the fate of this species is very much in the hands of rural landowners. It is important for them to maintain suitable shrike habitat away from roads that include hedgerows and permanent pastures, and reduce pesticide use.

In Manitoba, a Recovery Action Group was recently formed to promote public awareness of the plight of endangered eastern subspecies and to work with landowners and interest groups to protect and enhance nesting habitat in southeastern Manitoba.

Get Involved in Recovery

If you have a Loggerhead shrike on your property, congratulations. Your land management skills have helped to maintain the population of one of Canada's rarest birds. Contact the Wildlife Branch, or your nearest Manitoba Conservation office, if you would like more information on what you can do to further enhance your land for this and other native Manitoba plant and animal species.

If you are a landowner, it is important to retain some land for the Loggerhead shrike. A modest area around a nest can be fenced off to keep the nest from being damaged or disturbed by livestock.

If you see a Loggerhead shrike, contact Manitoba Conservation at one of the numbers listed below.

Manitoba Conservation
Wildlife Branch
Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent
Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3
(204) 945-7775
www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.html

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Manitoba Conservation
Regional Offices

Eastern Region
Lac du Bonnet
(204) 345-1427

Central Region
Gimli
(204) 642-6077

Western Region
Brandon
(204) 726-6450

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Partners in production of this fact sheet:
Manitoba Conservation, Wildlife Branch
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service
Manitoba Cattle Producers Association

Extirpated Species
Any species once native to Manitoba that has disappeared through all of its Manitoba range. Extirpated species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Endangered Species
Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Threatened Species
Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Vulnerable Species
Species not regulated under the *Endangered Species Act* but which could eventually be considered Endangered or Threatened if the factors affecting them do not improve.