

# Western Meadowlark

*Sturnella neglecta*

The buoyant, flutelike melody of the Western Meadowlark ringing out across a field can brighten anyone's day. Meadowlarks are often more easily heard than seen, unless you spot a male singing from a fence post. This colorful member of the blackbird family flashes a vibrant yellow breast crossed by a distinctive, black, V-shaped band. Look and listen for these stout ground feeders in grasslands, meadows, pastures, and along marsh edges throughout the West and Midwest, where flocks strut and feed on seeds and insects.

## Keys to Identification

### Size and Shape

The Western Meadowlark is the size of a robin but chunkier and shorter-tailed, with a flat head, long, slender bill, and a round-shouldered posture that nearly conceals its neck. The wings are rounded and short for the bird's size and the tail is short, stiff, and spiky.

### Color Pattern

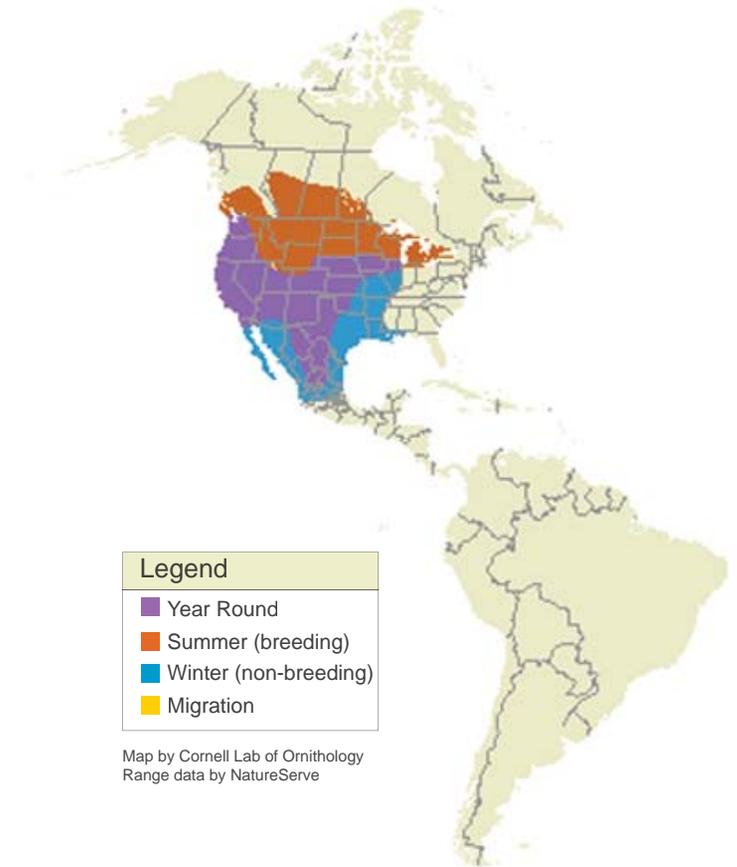
Western Meadowlarks have yellow underparts with intricately patterned brown, black and buff upperparts. A black "V" crosses the bright yellow breast; it is gray in winter. Contrasting stripes of dark brown and light buff mark the head. The outer tail feathers flash white in flight.

### Behavior

Look for Western Meadowlarks foraging on the ground alone or, in winter, in small, loose flocks. When flushed, Western Meadowlarks fly low, wings below the horizontal, gliding and flapping with short, stiff, quail-like wingbeats. In spring and summer, males sing out from atop fence posts, bushes, power lines, and other high points.

### Habitat

Western Meadowlarks seek the wide open spaces of native grasslands and agricultural fields for spring and summer breeding and winter foraging. Look for them among low to medium-height grasses more so than in tall fields. They also occur along the weedy verges of roads, marsh edges, and mountain meadows up to 10,000 feet.



## Measurements

### Both Sexes

- Length - 6.3 - 10.2 inches
- Wingspan - 16.1 inches
- Weight - 3.1 - 4.1 ounces