

# Loggerhead Shrike

## Shrike Facts

Their predatory habits have earned shrike's the nickname "butcher bird".

For hunting, shrikes prefer a mix of grass heights – some patches of tall grasses to harbor mice and voles and areas of shorter grasses for hunting insects such as grasshoppers.

With grasshoppers and other insects making up 70% of their diet, shrikes are valuable pest-control agents.

A close relative, the northern shrike, is seen in Alberta during migration and winter months. It nests further north, in Arctic tundra and taiga habitats.

### Prairie Songbird with a Meaty Appetite

Loggerhead shrikes are migratory songbirds that nest in trees and shrubs but require open grasslands for foraging. Shrikes are unique predators that impale their prey on thorns or barbed wire. They prey on small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects.

For nesting, shrikes prefer thorny buffaloberry, willow, Manitoba maple and caragana. They will sometimes return to nest in the same shrub year after year.

Loggerhead shrikes thrive on native grasslands with patches of trees, shrubs and various grass heights, which may be encouraged through a sustainable grazing system, thus allowing ranching and shrikes to coexist.

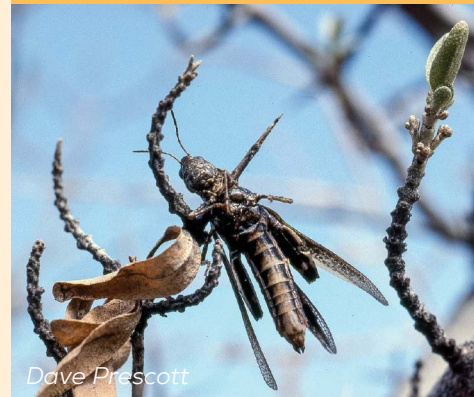
Loggerhead shrikes are designated as a species of **Special Concern** in Alberta and as **Threatened** nationally. The population is estimated to be between 8,000-10,000 pairs in the province, as of 2019 survey data.

Loggerhead shrikes are susceptible to the loss of native prairie habitats, as well as pesticide use and the loss of wintering habitats.



*Katheryn Taylor*

Adult loggerhead shrike - note the hooked bill and thick black face mask.



*Dave Prescott*

Lacking the talons of birds of prey, shrikes impale their prey on thorns and wire.

## Life Cycle

### Late March - April

Return to breeding grounds from the south and mate.

Females may mate with more than one male or may switch mates.

### Mid May

Build nest in tall shrubs and lay an average of six eggs.

Only females incubate eggs while males forage for food.

### Early June

Eggs hatch.

May re-nest if first attempt fails.

Many shrikes will return to the same nesting site next season.

### Late August

Return to southern USA or Mexico.



*Brad Downey*

## Recipe for Optimal Shrike Habitat

at least 80% flat native grassland

at least 5% tall shrubs, preferably over 1m tall



Adam Moltzahn



Liz Saunders

Thorny buffaloberry (bull berry) is favoured by shrikes.

# Beneficial Management Practices for Shrikes

## General

Maintain native prairie in its natural state.

Maintain trees and upland shrubs.

Protect abandoned railroad right-of-ways as they often provide native shrub habitat for shrikes.

Protect woody riparian vegetation around water bodies.

Plant native shrubs where they have been removed or where they are not regenerating naturally, especially in areas with high vegetation diversity and near fences.

Maintain shelterbelts and add native shrubs to them. Leave a 2-4 metre grassy area around shelterbelts to allow foraging near nests.

Reduce linear nature of shelterbelts by planting shrubs irregularly and in patches.

Avoid the use of insecticides and other chemicals that target shrike prey, especially around nests.

Seed marginal cropland back to native grasses or to permanent cover for use as a tame pasture.

## Grazed Land

Create variability in the pasture. A range of grass heights is desirable, with taller grass (>20cm) near shrubs that may be nesting sites.

Light to moderate grazing will promote plant and insect diversity and keep grass height variable.

Provide lightly grazed shrubby areas for nesting habitat during the breeding season (late March to July).

Maintain healthy streamside (riparian) shrubs and trees. Avoid grazing these areas during the breeding season and manage them carefully to improve or maintain riparian health.



Liz Saunders

The best decision you can make for all species at risk is to preserve your native grasslands.



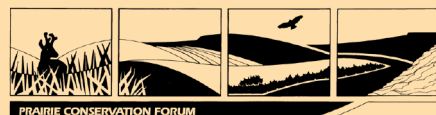
Brook Skagen



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Conserving Alberta's Wild Side



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