

Alberta's Prairie Species at Risk: Identification Guide



Golden Eagle

AB Status: Sensitive

ID: Large. Dark brown body. Golden highlights along back of head. Yellow on base of beak.

Habitat: Nest in river valleys. Feed in grasslands.

Diet: Jack rabbits, cottontails, carrion.

Other: Migratory. In Alberta March - October.



Plains Spadefoot

AB Status: May be at risk

ID: Gray, brown or green. Pug face. Vertical pupil. Black 'spades' at back of feet used for digging.

Habitat: Temporary ponds. Hibernate nearby in dry years. Prefer sandy soils.

Diet: Spiders, insects.

Other: Call sounds like snoring. Breed only in wet years.



Short-eared Owl

AB Status: May be at risk

ID: Medium sized. Dark brown back. Beige chest streaked with brown. Yellow eyes.

Habitat: Open areas such as grasslands, haylands, meadows, marshlands.

Diet: Voles, deer mice, shrews.

Other: Nest on the ground.



Bullsnake

AB Status: Sensitive

ID: Large (95-180cm long). Yellow/brown with dark spots. Head and neck are same width.

Habitat: Badlands or river valleys with sandy and brushy areas.

Diet: Small mammals, birds, eggs, reptiles.

Other: Can reach up to 2m in length making it the second largest snake in Canada.



American Badger

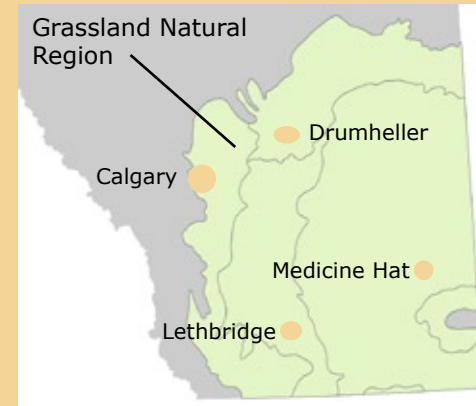
AB Status: Sensitive - Data deficient

ID: White stripe down centre of face. Flat body. Short legs. Large ears. Gray/white fur.

Habitat: Open grasslands with moderately coarse or fine soils.

Diet: Richardson's ground squirrels, northern pocket gophers.

Other: Dig burrows that are used by burrowing owls, swift fox and snakes.



85% of Alberta's species at risk are found on the prairies, known as the *Grassland Natural Region*.

Sprague's Pipit

AB Status: Sensitive - Special concern

ID: Small brown bird. White edges on feathers. Males have high pitched, descending flight song.

Habitat: Nest in native grasslands.

Diet: Grasshoppers, beetles, insects.

Other: Found only in native grasslands.



Upland Sandpiper

AB Status: Sensitive

ID: Medium sized bird. Long yellowish legs. White stomach. Chest and back barred with brown. Large, dark eyes. Yellow bill. Often perch on fenceposts.

Habitat: Native grasslands with a variety of grass heights. Will use seeded pasture or hay fields.

Diet: Grasshoppers, weevils, spiders, earthworms.

Other: Migratory. In Alberta May - September.



Visit www.albertawildspecies.ca to see a complete list of species at risk in Alberta.

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Using this guide

AB Status: Alberta's designated status (General - Detailed)

General status: All wildlife are ranked as At risk, May be at risk, Sensitive, Undetermined or Secure

Detailed status: At risk and may be at risk species may be given this legal status and protected by law. Could be ranked as Endangered, Threatened, Special concern, Data deficient, Extinct or Extirpated.

ID: Identification tips

Habitat: Where the animal lives

Diet: What the animal eats

Other: Interesting information

Sharp-tailed Grouse

AB Status: Sensitive

ID: Brown wings and neck with white bands. White belly. Pointy tail. Males have yellow above eyes and display purple air sacs when dancing for females.

Habitat: Native grasslands with shrubby areas. Leks found on flat, sparsely vegetated areas.

Diet: *Winter* - berries, grain, tree buds. *Summer* - insects, leaves, blossoms.

Other: Males perform dances on leks to attract females. Same leks are used year after year.



Ferruginous Hawk

AB Status: At risk - Endangered

ID: Largest hawk. Has dark and light phases. Both have bright yellow upper beaks.

Light phase - Brown/red legs, white chest and neck. Brown/red on back and wings.

Dark phase - Dark brown body. White wing tips and tail.

Habitat: Nest in lone trees, on hoodoos or on cliffs near native grasslands.

Diet: Richardson's ground squirrels, mice, birds.

Other: Migratory. In Alberta March - October.



Prairie Rattlesnake

AB Status: May be at risk - Data deficient

ID: Diamond shaped head. Rattle on tail. Tan body with dark spots.

Habitat: Slopes near major rivers and grasslands suitable for hibernacula. Mammal burrows, stable slumps, crevasses often used.

Diet: Small mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles.

Other: Young do not have rattles. Rattles sometimes lost in fight, vehicle accident, or may even fall off. Venom is rarely fatal to an adult human.



Prairie Falcon

AB Status: Sensitive - Special concern

ID: Brown back and wings. Cream coloured wing tips, chest and bands above eyes. Dark 'armpits'. Dark moustache descending from beak.

Habitat: Nest along cliffs. Hunt in native grasslands.

Diet: Richardson's ground squirrels, mice, rabbits, birds.

Other: Migratory. In Alberta March - October.



Greater Sage Grouse

AB Status: At risk - Endangered

ID: Large brown body with white feather tips. Dark stomach. Long tail. Males much larger and have yellow air sacs and white breasts.

Habitat: Sagebrush in native grasslands.

Diet: Forbs and insects.

Other: Males perform dances on leks to attract females. Same leks are used year after year. Found only in SE corner of Alberta.



Long-billed Curlew

AB Status: Sensitive - Special concern

ID: Large brown/beige body. Long neck and legs. Long, curved bill.

Habitat: Native grasslands.

Diet: Grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, ants, spiders, birds and reptiles.

Other: Migratory. In Alberta March - October.



Loggerhead Shrike

AB Status: Sensitive - Special concern

ID: Small, predatory songbird. Dark gray back and head. Lighter underneath. Black band across eye and on wings.

Habitat: Shrubs and trees near native grasslands. (Especially thorny buffaloberry).

Diet: Grasshoppers, crickets, mice, voles.

Other: Requires thorns or barbs to impale prey.



Burrowing Owl

AB Status: At risk - Endangered

ID: Small body. Long legs. Brown and white barring on entire body. Darker back and wings.

Habitat: Nest in burrows on open, treeless native grasslands. Burrows are dug by other animals.

Diet: Grasshoppers, crickets, mice, ground squirrels, voles.



Northern Leopard Frog

AB Status: At risk - Threatened

ID: Bright green to brown with black spots. Lighter belly. Two light stripes run along back.

Habitat: Permanent wetlands that will not freeze to bottom with clean, clear water and abundant vegetation.

Diet: Insects.

Other: Reintroduction program has increased its distribution in Alberta.



Short-horned Lizard

AB Status: At risk - Endangered

ID: Very small (5-7cm long). Brown/beige with short horns on back.

Habitat: Sparsely vegetated south-facing slopes of coulees and canyons.

Diet: Grasshoppers, ants, beetles.

Other: Found only in SE Alberta.



Swift Fox

AB Status: At risk - Endangered

ID: Black tip on tail. Dark patches on muzzle. Gray on back, red/brown on lower body and neck.

Habitat: Den in burrows. Prefer flat, unfragmented native grasslands.

Diet: Small mammals, carrion, invertebrates, birds.

Other: Were successfully reintroduced to SE Alberta after extirpation.

