

Loggerhead Shrike

Lanius ludovicianus



Identification

Slightly smaller than a robin at about 8 in/20 cm tall, gray with black wings and tail, white throat and breast, white patches on the wings (especially visible when the bird is flying), and a black mask across the eyes. At close range, the hooked beak can be seen. Males and females look similar, as do breeding and non-breeding shrikes. Loggerhead shrikes can be found in an open variety of habitats with short vegetation, fence rows, orchards, agricultural fields, riparian areas, and open woodlands. They will use barbed wire and branches to store food (e.g., lizards).



Photo credit: Alan Schmierer/Flickr

Observation Tips

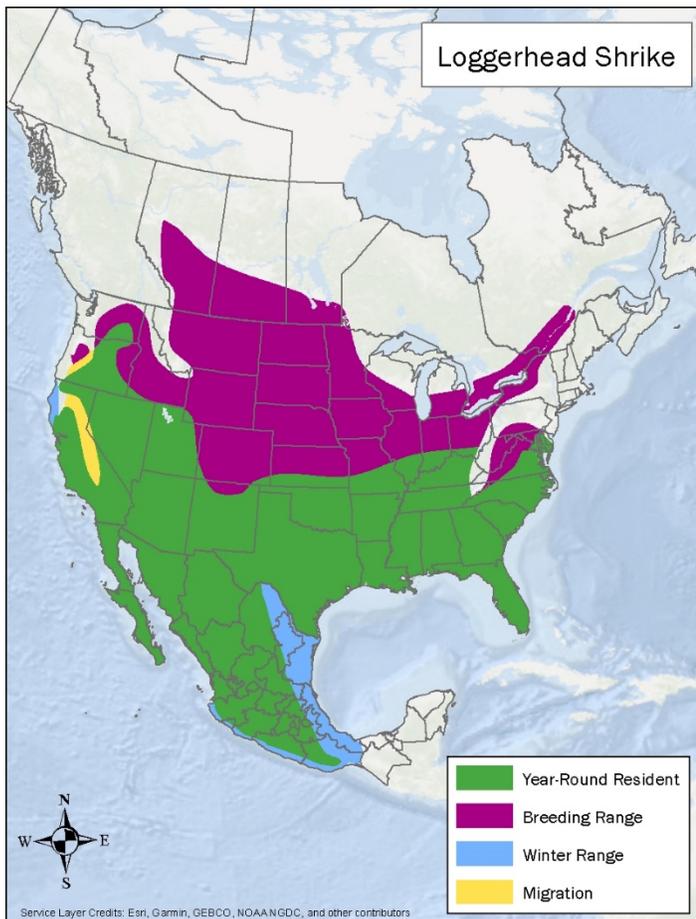
Look for loggerhead shrike perched on fence wires or posts and tops of shrubs. Look out for lizards and small animals impaled on barbed wire fences too. Most birds arrive to their breeding grounds as early as March and some won't migrate again in the fall until October or even November.

Interesting Fact

Some insects and amphibians are naturally toxic to birds, so shrikes store these toxic animals on thorns or barbed wire for a day or two until the toxins have degraded and the food is safe to eat.

Ideal Habitat

Loggerhead shrikes require areas with scattered or clustered trees and shrubs in open country, with a mix of short (<4 in/6 cm) and tall (>8 in/20 cm) grasses. They usually forage over areas of shorter grass, probably because prey is easier to detect. Popular shrubs for nesting include greasewood, saltbush and sagebrush; popular trees include hackberries, hawthorns and red cedar. They often build their nests in thorny vegetation, possibly to protect the nests from predators. If not trees or shrubs are available, they may nest in brush piles or tumble weeds.



Range Map provided by BirdLife International

Management Activities that Benefit Species – Best Management Practices (BMPs)

Avoid heavy grazing (especially in areas where grass is naturally short or sparse) and promote tall vegetation patches, <8 in/20 cm, which provides habitat for prey. Protect known nest trees and shrubs from extensive browsing or rubbing by livestock and from destruction by fire, herbicides or other causes. Maintain tall grasses, shrubs and other vegetation along fence lines and other areas near known nest trees to provide habitat for prey. Establish new thickets with thorns, where appropriate.

Management Activities to Avoid

Control rather than eradicate populations of the principle insect prey species (grasshoppers, crickets, beetles) at levels compatible with economic activities on the land. Insecticides have direct (poisoning) and indirect (loss of prey) effects on shrikes.

Other Species that Benefit from Similar Habitat Management

Other species that may benefit from habitat management for loggerhead shrikes include Swainson's hawk, American kestrel, burrowing owl, long-eared owl, northern shrike and northern mockingbird.

Other Resources

BirdLife International and Handbook of the Birds of the World. 2019, Bird species distribution maps of the world. Version 2019.1. [Loggerhead shrike](#)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [Birds of the World \(Loggerhead shrike\)](#)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [All About Birds \(Loggerhead shrike\)](#)

NatureServe, 2019. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. [Loggerhead shrike](#)