

eastern meadowlark

Sturnella magna

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Passeriformes
Family: Icteridae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

FEATURES

Two species of meadowlark are present in Illinois: the eastern meadowlark and the western meadowlark. They are very difficult to tell apart by sight, but their song can help identify them. Both birds have yellow breast feathers with a large, black “v” marking. The white, outer, tail feathers may be seen when the bird flies. The back feathers are brown. The western meadowlark is paler than the eastern meadowlark, and the yellow on its throat touches its cheek. The meadowlark averages nine inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen).

BEHAVIORS

The eastern meadowlark is a common migrant and summer resident statewide and a common winter resident in the southern one-third of the state. Its whistled song is “tee-yah, tee-yair.” This meadowlark may be seen sitting on fences or wires or flying with short, choppy flaps and a glide. It lives in pastures, hay fields, fallow fields and near row crops. Spring migrants generally arrive in Illinois in March. Migration occurs during the day. Eggs are produced from April through July. The nest is built on the ground. The female constructs the nest of dried grasses in a depression in the ground in a period of about three to eight days. The nest is covered with a domelike, grass canopy, leaving an opening on the side. Two to six, white eggs with red-brown speckles are deposited by the female, and she alone incubates them for the 14-day incubation period. The nest is often parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird that deposits an egg that the meadowlark will hatch and raise, taking food and care away from its own young. Predation and mowing are the main reasons for loss of nests. This bird eats insects when available, switching to seeds and grains when the insects are gone. Fall migrants begin arriving in Illinois during October.

photo provided by SteveByland/pond5.com



ILLINOIS RANGE



Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie