



Photo by George Jameson

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common name	Western Meadowlark
scientific name	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>
phylum	Chordata
class	Aves
order	Passeriformes
family	Emberizidae
habitat	grasslands, open fields, meadows, prairies, and plains
size	22 to 28 cm tall

- description** The Western Meadowlark is brown with a short brown and white tail. The sides and the lower part of the breast are whitish with flecks of black. A black "v" crosses the bright yellow breast.
- fun facts** The feathers on the breast of the Western Meadowlark are bright yellow with buff (light tan) tips. In autumn when the feathers are new, we see the feather tips, so the bird's breast looks buff. By the time spring comes, the feathers are older and the buff-colored tips have worn away. So, in springtime the Western Meadowlark has a bright yellow breast.
- life cycle** Western Meadowlarks build nests in grasslands and fields on the ground, nestled in a clump of grass or other plants. They weave dry grass into a bowl shape and line it with hair. The female lays three to five eggs, then sits on them for about two weeks. The young leave the nest before they can fly and must hide in the grass for safety. They gather in groups and look for food. After 6 weeks the young are full grown.
- ecology** Western Meadowlarks eat grasshoppers, beetles, crickets, spiders, and caterpillars. Coyotes eat Western Meadowlarks and so do many other birds, including the White-tailed Kites, Swainson's Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers and falcons.
- conservation** The Swainson's Hawk is an endangered species and its numbers are decreasing in the Sacramento Valley. The Western Meadowlark is a much more common

bird. If we preserve good habitat for the meadowlark, in what way can this help protect the Swainson's Hawk? If we wanted to increase the number of Western Meadowlarks, when would we avoid mowing a grassland?

investigate

In the grasslands, watch for the flash of yellow of the Western Meadowlark's breast. You are more likely to hear the Western Meadowlark before you see it. Listen carefully for its many beautiful songs, similar to one another. Try imitating them by whistling.

