

## **The Importance of Prairie Landowners to Loggerhead Shrikes**

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The Loggerhead Shrike is an interesting bird who although is classified as a songbird, hunts for its lunch much more like a hawk! Also known as the “butcherbird”, the Loggerhead Shrike eats insects, rodents, reptiles, amphibians and even small birds. Loggerheads often impale their prey on barbed wire or thorns as a way of storing excess food, displaying hunting prowess to females, or to aid in eating large prey as they lack the strong talons typical of larger birds of prey such as hawks.

The Prairie Loggerhead Shrike population has been declining since the 1960s and their range has contracted. In Saskatchewan, where most of Canada’s Prairie Loggerhead Shrikes breed, the greatest declines are in the southeastern corner of the province and the Aspen Parkland region.

Rural landowners play a key role in conserving prairie habitat and maintaining healthy grassland ecosystems. Sound management practices help ensure a healthy grassland ecosystem that will benefit both the landowner and wildlife such as the Loggerhead Shrike that may utilize the area as habitat.

Nature Saskatchewan has been operating the Shrubs for Shrikes (SFS) programs since 2003 to help protect Loggerhead Shrike habitat from destruction and cultivation, monitor population changes and increase the awareness of the shrike. SFS aims to work with rural landowners who are interested in conserving habitat that Loggerhead Shrikes select such as shelterbelts, farmyards, and abandoned farmsteads for nesting and pastures and surrounding areas for hunting. Due to the location of their habitat, success in conserving Loggerhead Shrikes relies, in part, on the interest of landowners and their informed actions.

The following Best Management Practices (BMP’s) have been developed by Nature Saskatchewan as actions that landowners can take to aid in the protection of the Loggerhead Shrike:

- Maintain grassland pastures at least one quarter-section in size, preferably in close proximity to other grasslands.
- Prevent bird access to grain (clean up spilled grain and store grain in bird and rodent proof bins), and adjust feeding times to the afternoon when invasive species like European Starlings and sparrows are less active.
- Moderate grazing intensities, durations and frequencies between May and October to create a mosaic of shorter and taller grasses within a pasture.
- Plant trees and shrubs in areas where they already exist such as upgrading shelterbelts or in abandoned farmsteads.
- Restrict livestock access to woody vegetation, i.e. shelterbelts, during the spring when these plants are susceptible to damage, as livestock tend to destroy woody vegetation by rubbing.
- Use prescribed burning to manage woody vegetation and provide variable vegetation structure.
- Plant woody vegetation at least 200m from busy roads.

For more information on the Loggerhead Shrike or the Shrubs for Shrikes Program, please visit the Nature Saskatchewan website [www.naturesask.ca](http://www.naturesask.ca).