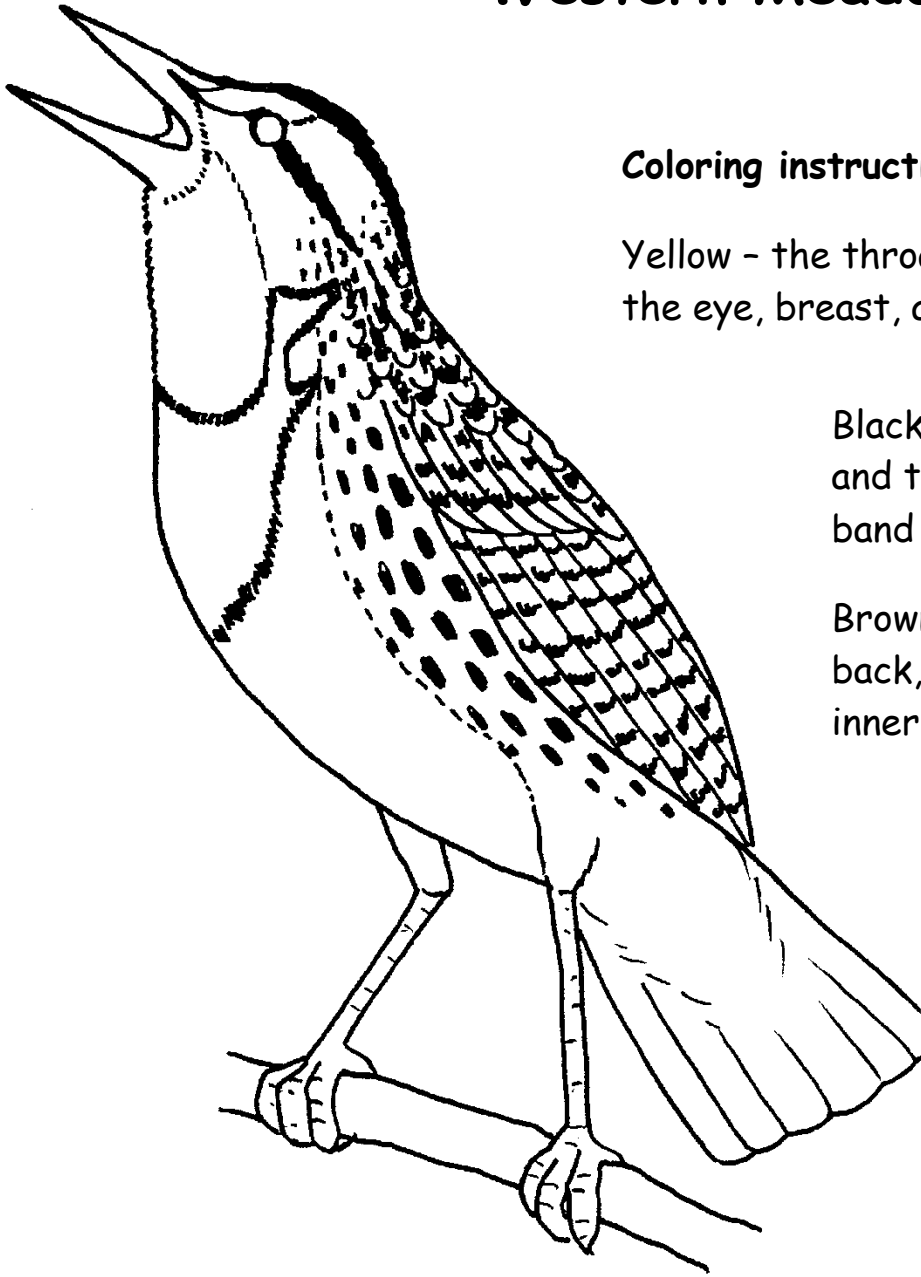


Western Meadowlark



Coloring instructions:

Yellow - the throat, patch above the eye, breast, and belly

Black - the bill, eye, and the big breast band

Brown - the wings, back, ear patch, and inner part of the tail

White - the thighs, the sides (which have large dark spots), undertail coverts, and outer tail feathers

Pinkish gray - the legs

Western Meadowlark

Length: 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Habitat: Common resident in fields and grasslands

Field marks: Black V on neck against a bright yellow throat, breast, and belly; white edges on tail in flight.

Sometimes a bird really wants to be noticed - such as when it is seeking a mate. Other times, it wants to be overlooked - such as when a predator is passing by. A meadowlark is a brilliant example of how a bird can do both.

The front of the meadowlark is bright yellow with a bold black V upon it. When a meadowlark stands upright atop a fence post or telephone pole and faces the sunlight, the yellow and black feathers shine. But if the bird is feeding on the ground or if the bird is crouched down, hiding, then only the back is visible. The back of the meadowlark is shaded with streaks of brown. It blends in perfectly with the grasslands.

Meadowlarks have another way to call attention to themselves. They have one of the loveliest songs around. The sound is distinctive - piercing but flutelike notes which often "split" so two notes are heard together. The melody is harder to describe because a meadowlark has many songs. The meadowlark changes the song from one to another as the nesting season progresses.

You will usually both see and hear a meadowlark singing from the highest perch around, usually a fence post or telephone pole. However, meadowlarks are birds of wide open grasslands. How did they draw attention to themselves before people brought in fence posts or telephone poles?

Meadowlarks have a **flight song**. They sing as they rise into the air and then flutter back down with a distinctive flight that reveals the conspicuous white outer tail feathers. Not many birds sing as they fly.

Open grassland is exposed, dangerous territory. Most birds that nest out there are precocial birds which can move away within hours after the quiet, stationary eggs turn into moving, squeaking babies. Meadowlarks are one of the few **altricial** birds that nest on the ground in wide open country. To protect the nest, meadowlarks build a dome of grass over the nest so it can't be seen from a hawk's or coyote's point of view. These nests can be found by watching carefully from where the bird flushes as it tries to get away from you. Do not touch the eggs or the nest.

Western Meadowlark Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a Western Meadowlark. The male and female look the same.
- See a meadowlark singing from a telephone pole or fence post. They usually begin singing in February.
- See a meadowlark perform its flight song.
- Listen to the meadowlark song enough to recognize a shift in song as the nesting season progresses.
- In the winter, see meadowlarks in large flocks.

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