



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/western-meadowlark-sturnella-neglecta/

By colliiek2

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‘Little grass shack’

This 1930’s Hawaiian song kicked off a multi-ethnic music craze perfect for the Western Meadowlark.

Female Western Meadowlarks build a ground nest that is often covered by a woven grass roof — a ‘Little Grass Shack’ so to speak.

The ‘little grass shack’ nest is a small hollow hidden in dense grass cover. The shack has an entrance tunnel that may extend several feet with several narrow trails leading to it.



Western Meadowlark (courtesy ODFW)

Identifying

Visually, this medium-sized bird sports a dapper Herringbone-like plume with a black V-lapel and yellow vest. This color and pattern palette helps camouflage the birds in the open grasslands.

Habitat and Range

Western Meadowlarks call meadows, fields, desert shrub-steppe, marshes, and agricultural grasslands home throughout their range. Low-growing vegetation provides foraging cover.

Western Meadowlarks are widely distributed from southern Canada to central America; and from the Mississippi River west. Many birds are permanent residences and breed along the Oregon coast.

Food

Meadowlarks forage on the ground looking mostly for a wide variety of bugs, seeds, and berries. In the winter, the birds will often forage in mixed flocks of blackbirds and starlings. Winter diet often focuses on seeds and grains.

Meadowlarks, like other blackbird family members, use a feeding behavior called “gaping.” They drive their sharp, pointy bill into the soil, bark, etc. They use strong jaw muscles to force the material open. This hole provides access to foods other birds can’t reach.

Predators

Ground nests are inadvertently destroyed during mowing, and weather (droughts) can be very tough on nestlings.

Bird Song

Six states recognize the western meadowlark as their State Bird, including Oregon. In 1927, Oregon selected the Western Meadowlark as their State Songbird.

Western Meadowlark song is significantly more complicated and flute like compared to other closely related birds.

Males defend their breeding territory by singing. They often sing from the tops of fences, shrubs, and powerlines.

A Party in a Grass Shack?

The little grass shack this bird builds is quite unique, just like the Hawaiian song “Little Grass Shack.” This song is one of Hawaii’s “50 Greatest...” and featured in many movies, performances, and recordings.

The song features one full line in Hawaiian “Komo mai no kāua i ka hale welakahao.” This line or Dolly Parton’s 1987 interpretation may be a great way to remember this unique bird.

She translated the line as “***Come to my house, we’re gonna party!***” Maybe that is **what the male birds are really singing about.**

REFERENCES:

- Western Meadowlark (<https://myodfw.com/wildlife-viewing/species/blackbirds-grackles-and-orioles>)
- Audubon Society, Western Meadowlark (<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/western-meadowlark>)
- Wikipedia, Western Meadowlark (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_meadowlark) and (...My_Little_Grass_Shack_in_Kealahakua,_Hawaii)
- All About Birds, Western Meadowlark (https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/western_meadowlark)