

# Northern Shrike

(*Lanius excubitor*)

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

### *Appearance:*

A medium-sized, predatory songbird; males and females look alike, although females may be duller overall; large head with a black mask and rounded forehead; stout, hooked bill; gray back and belly; whitish throat and chest; black wings with a white patch; black, medium-long tail with white outer tail feathers.

### *Measurements:*

Overall length = 10"  
Wingspan = 12 – 14"  
Weight = 2 – 3 oz.  
(56 – 79 g)

### *Voice:*

Song is a variable, complex series of harsh notes, chattering, trills, and whistles. Both males and females sing throughout the year; the male, in particular, sings in late winter and early spring. Calls include a fast, raspy “shak shak”; a nasal “fay fay”; and a harsh, dry “shraaaa”.



Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### *Similar Species:*

The Loggerhead Shrike is a summer resident in Wyoming, although the ranges of these two shrikes may overlap during migration. The Loggerhead Shrike is slightly smaller overall and has a flattened forehead, a smaller bill, and a wider black mask. The Northern Mockingbird's coloration is similar to the Northern Shrike, but it lacks the black mask and its bill is narrow, pointed, and lacks the hooked tip.

### WHERE TO FIND:

A common winter resident in Wyoming. Occurs below 7,000 feet in open, shrubby fields and woodland edges where tall perch sites are present.

## BEST TIME FOR OBSERVATIONS:

Most easily seen in late fall through winter when it migrates into Wyoming from its breeding grounds in Alaska and northern Canada. Although typically wary and difficult to approach, look on tall perch sites where solitary birds sit and wait for exposed prey (insects, small mammals, small birds, and reptiles). Often impales its prey on thorns, spines, or barbed wire; may consume prey right away or wait until later.

### STATUS:

Not classified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wyoming. Populations are considered stable because large areas of suitable breeding habitat in Alaska and Canada are currently protected from loss or degradation.