

All that went behind this man, and with him, makes you want to save what he appreciated, for he could make you love it more. The intensity and joyousness of his interest and enthusiasm seemed somehow to pervade, color and make your own experiences in nature even more meaningful. It was this spirit that went with working and birding with John Elliott, a feeling that I won't forget in my conservation work and birding — but I shall miss his being there.

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FIELD NOTES

Dutchess County's Singular Eastern-Western Meadowlark Successful Hybridization:

On June 18, 1962 word reporting the sighting of what was presumed to be a male Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) was received. The place of this first sighting for Eastern New York State was in the northeastern part of Dutchess County, approximately nine air miles from Connecticut. Naturally this news was received with interest by a number of Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club members in the area.

My personal introduction to the bird, so similar in appearance to our Eastern Meadowlark (*S. magna*), was on June 19. The weather was clear and hot, preceded by several such days and by an early dry spring.

The habitat in which this Western Meadowlark was found seemed a far cry from the prairie type environment one may visualize as its home domain. The singster's choice of topography was composed of fairly open rolling, sidehill hay and pasture fields, interspersed with small wooded areas. The observed range traversed by this bird was some two hundred and fifty yards in radius and the land elevation was between 850' and 950'.

Further study on June 20 revealed that the bird seemed to show a preference to sing from a specific area on a telephone line sixty feet away from a country cross road. Here, he frequently perched and gave forth his beautiful, quite flute-like varied songs and calls. Observations by this time indicated that this Western bird was attentive to a female Eastern Meadowlark and a mating may have ensued — a rarity even where the two species' territory overlap and where they are commonly found in the same field.

At times, when the female returned to the singing area, the male flew to meet her repeating the short, guttural, 'chuck, chuck' and/or the gurgling, rolling calls of the Western Meadowlark. These distinctive calls were given intermittently through the day.

At no time was another Meadowlark of either species viewed in the immediate region. Several times observers heard notes similar to those of the Western Meadowlark, raising the question as to the possibility of more than one of that species being about. This, I feel, was not the case, having noted a starling nesting nearby, emitting like calls.

On June 23, attempts to locate the anticipated nest of this pair of Meadowlarks resulted in these observations. At intervals of ten to fifteen minutes, the female returned to the vicinity of the telephone line, circled about and lit on the ground 20' to 30' north of what later proved to be the nest. The female's trips through the short hay to the nest and the subsequent feeding took several minutes. Only on one occasion did the male appear to accompany here to the nest. After watching closely the point of the bird's departures, I made a direct approach to the spot. On the ground, in and under a roughly arched tuft of dry grass and lined with the same material, was the nest. The nest opening, about 2½" in diameter, revealed the presence of five young birds. Natal down was still attached to the ends of their partially sheathed feathers, and the brood all appeared in good health. Some spotting of breast feathers was discernable and also the yellow breast coloring as is present in the adults. During my brief period at the nest, the male made short flights from his perch and gave forth many of his 'chuck' and rolling calls. The

female returned in a few minutes from afield, approached and left the nest as previously. The male again resumed his songs and calls from his favored perch some 30 feet from the nest.

Dr. Wesley Lanyon, an assistant Curctor of Ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, has spent considerable time studying Meadowlarks and is still engaged in research of the two species. Dr. Lanyon had learned of this far ranging Western Meadowlark and viewed the bird a few days prior to June 26. On this date he arrived to trap the male bird, his mate and the brood.

The male was finally trapped late in the day by using another male Western Meadowlark as a decoy. Prior to capture, the Dutchess songster's identity had been confirmed by songs and calls. Now, further verification of its being a Western Meadowlark was aided by noting the paler coloring of the upper parts and the extension of the yellow color of the throat up on the bird's cheek.

The female Eastern Meadowlark was trapped at the nest and the young, ready to fledge, were also taken. The entire family was transported that night to the Museum's aviary on Long Island where Dr. Lanyon hopes to accomplish further breeding of the parents and the hybrid brood.

Recent correspondence regarding these Dutchess County birds informs us that all are in excellent plumage and healthy. The sex ratio of the young, worked out on the basis of wing measurements made from the fresh basic plumage of last fall, is four females and one male.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that there has been a gradual easterly spread of the Western Meadowlark over the past half century. Sightings have been made in the Western part of New York State. However, The Dutchess County incident is the most easterly nesting sighting of the species and the mating, plus the successful rearing of the hybrid young is most unusual. The future will doubtless disclose more such immigrants and it behooves us, when afield, to be alert to this possibility, and to make careful observations.

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Effects of unharvested corn on bird populations: Last fall (1962), on our farm near Binghamton, we were unable to harvest about two acres of corn, and it remained standing all winter. Snow was drifted deeply in the field all winter and the grain attracted only a few crows and raccoons.

This Spring (1963) the bird population seemed to be greatly enhanced by the attraction of the grain. The following figures for 1963 represent the highest numbers of birds counted at various times between April 1st and May 15. The figures for a comparable period in 1962 are from my day by day records for this immediate area.

	1963	1962
Rusty Blackbirds -----	9	none
Red-winged Blackbirds -----	150	50
Crows -----	40	5
Cowbirds -----	40 to 50	10
Starlings -----	60 to 80	50
Grackles -----	100 to 120	0 to 5
Mourning Doves -----	10	0 to 4
Mallard Duck -----	one pair	none
Black Duck -----	one pair	none
Bobolink -----	8 to 10	5
Meadow Lark -----	10 to 15	5

To add to the picture of the bionomics of this spot there have been the nestings of two avian predators in the immediate vicinity. A Great Horned Owl nested within a few hundred feet from the south end of the corn field and two owl fledglings finally left this nest on May 22. The other predators are a pair of Cooper's Hawks which are nesting within a few hundred feet from the north end of the field. The Black Ducks remained to nest at a nearby pond and the grackles are nesting in this area where they have not nested within my memory or at least my record keeping.