

A THIRD POST-1875 NESTING OF DICKCISSEL IN NEW YORK STATE

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Before 1870 the Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) was a common or abundant breeder in the middle states east of the Alleghenies (Eaton 1914), preferring lush grassy fields in lowland areas. Ornithologists do not know why or exactly when it disappeared from the northeast. Bull (1974) lists only two post-1875 records of the Dickcissel: a successful nesting in a hayfield in Meridian, Cayuga Co., in May 1937 reported by Benton and a June 1955 nesting near Victor, Ontario Co., that probably was destroyed by raccoons (Genesee Orn. Soc. 1985).

Although there is some evidence that this species may be trying to reestablish itself east of Ohio, New York state records are still rare, especially during the nesting season. Roy Slack and Cathie Baumgartner reported on a possible Dickcissel breeding colony in the Town of Pomfret, Chautauqua Co., where a female and from three to five males were observed during June 1975 (Slack and Baumgartner 1977). Up to ten males and five females were present in the same open field during June 1976 and Slack banded two females, both of whom had incubation patches. However, no nest was ever found. During the six-year period between 1981 and 1986 field work for the New York State Breeding Bird Atlas failed to establish the Dickcissel as a breeding species in a single block in the state (Andrle and Carroll 1988), although in 1980 a male discovered by Doug Bassett near Letchworth Park in Wyoming Co. sang and defended a territory through 7 July (Spahn 1980).

The third post-1875 Dickcissel nest was discovered at 09:30 on 29 June 1988, when the author flushed a female Dickcissel from a nest containing five unmarked blue eggs while conducting a breeding bird study census on a 26.5-acre upland managed Christmas tree farm. The nest, located two feet up in a four-foot Austrian Pine (*Pinus nigra*), was in a section of plantation also containing rows of Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens glauca*). The field, located at an elevation of 2170 feet in the town of Andover, Allegany Co., NY., is surrounded by fields planted to potatoes, grass and Christmas trees (Fig. 1). When I returned to the field at 16:30 on the same day the female circled and called agitatedly as I photographed the nest. She was joined by the male and continued calling and circling approximately 50 yards from the nest until I left the area.

Despite the cooperation of the owner of the plantation who marked the general vicinity of the nest, a crew of mowers and pruners worked in the field during the first week of July and the birds probably experi-



*Figure 1. Habitat surrounding the Dickcissel nest site.
Photograph by Elizabeth W. Brooks.*



*Figure 2. Dickcissel nest and eggs, town of Andover, Allegany County,
New York. Photograph by Elizabeth W. Brooks.*

enced considerable disturbance. At 10:00 on 6 July the nest and eggs were still intact but I could not find the adult birds and at no time did I hear the male sing. Since I normally do my censuses in the early morning I returned at 19:00 to see if the male might sing at a later hour. On this visit, I neither saw nor heard the adults. On 12 July, having allowed the full 14 days possible for the eggs to hatch (Harrison, 1978), I collected the nest and eggs (Fig. 2), which were covered with mites. The nest set has been deposited in the Buffalo Museum of Science.

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