

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD REPORT

☒ RARE OR UNUSUAL RECORD

☐ NEW STATE RECORD

CFO-ORC FILE NO. 54-75-37

☒ ACCEPTED

☐ REJECTED *11/2*

Species: EASTERN MEADOWLARK

Sturnella magna

(Vernacular Name)

(Scientific Name-use binomial)

Date(s): April 20 and May 10, 1975

Time Bird Seen: morning to

Locality: Red Lion State Wildlife Area

Nearest Town: Creek

County: Logan

Other observers who independently identified this bird:

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

Van Remsen

Steve Larson

Optical Equipment: 7 X 50 binoculars, 15-60 X Zoom telescope

If photographed, type of equipment used:

Light Conditions: various, mostly sunny, sun shining on birds several times

Distance from bird (how measured): minimum estimated distance of 70-75 feet

Number of Birds Seen: 1 Sex: Male Plumage: Adult

April 20-2 seen; May 00-10(7 seen) (presumably since they were singing)

Describe the bird's overall behavior and demeanor:

Observed perched on grass stalks, fences, walking in short grass on ground, behaving typically as meadowlarks.

Describe in great detail the bird's size, overall shape, plumage and color-pattern. Include details on shape of bill, wings and tail. Give particular emphasis to the marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance in field guide descriptions is not enough. Describe what you actually saw in the field:

Obviously meadowlarks. General appearance very close to Western, with a fairly long, tapering, grayish bills; crown white with blackish-brown streaks, yellow lores. Back ~~white~~ brown with numerous blackish markings, tail brown with broad white edges, throat, breast, belly bright yellow, with a strong, wide black V across breast, sides, flanks white with blackish markings, undertail coverts white (marked?). Two major plumage characteristics were noted that were used to make the identification of Eastern: 1-cheeks were pale whitish-gray, with no brownish cast and no streaks or markings as in the Western; 2-pattern of tail feathers different. In both species, tail feathers were brown with transverse black bars. In Eastern, these bars are interconnected along the vane, in the Western they are not. These characteristics were noted on birds of both species in the area through telescopes, Eastern-singing birds clearly had black bars connected (in addition to whiter, unmarked cheeks), while the opposite was true for all Western-singing birds observed carefully enough to determine those marks.

(OVER)

Describe the bird's song or call, if heard, including method of delivery, i.e., from perch, in flight, etc:

Song: a high, clear whistle consisting of three notes, the first note the highest.
Call: a high buzzy trill preceded by a different note.

Describe the habitat in which you observed this bird:

Moist, in most area moderately long grass surrounding numerous small ponds and marshes.

How were similarly appearing species eliminated?

The Western Meadowlark was eliminated by several points: Cheeks on these birds whiter and unmarked, pattern of tail feathers different (see discussion on previous birds). Songs and calls were different. The song was clearly very different from any Western Meadowlark song I have ever heard, even taking in account the wide range of individual variation. Not only the structure, but the quality is different. The songs always consisted of three notes, Westerns are almost always more (usually 7-8). The quality is clear and whistled, not like the full, throaty, almost bubbly quality of the Westerns. It is true that each species may learn each others songs, but it would seem unlikely to me that so many "Westerns" would learn the Eastern song so perfectly. During the entire time we were in the area (a couple of hours total), an Eastern never would sing another song. If it was a Western singing a learned song, it would seem as if it would occasionally lapse into its own song. While the two species may learn each other's songs, I understand that the call notes are diagnostic and never learned. The call notes of the Easterns were also distinctively different from the calls of the Westerns. Although similar, the Eastern call is not as dry as the Westerns, and is higher-pitched, and does not have a different note preceding the trill as in the Eastern. Although any field mark (cheeks, tail pattern, song) might be unreliable when regarded alone, the combination of all three, together with the supposedly diagnostic Eastern call note, leads me to firmly believe the birds could be nothing but Easterns. Prior experience with this and similarly appearing species:

Much experience with many Westerns. Have some experience with Easterns in the east, most recently, many seen and heard in Texas in late March 1975. No previous experience with Eastern in Colorado.

Books, illustrations and advice consulted and how did these influence this documentation?

This report was written from notes made during X after X observation; from memory _____

PRINT NAME: Robert Andrews SIGNATURE: Robert Andrews DATE: Nov 12, 1975
Street Address: 1390 So. Ivy Way Town and State: Denver, Colorado ZIP: 80

Return to: JACK REDDALL - 4450 South Alton Street, Englewood, Colorado 80110

Species: EASTERN MEADOWLARK

Sturnella magna

(Vernacular Name)

(Scientific Name-use binomial)

* Date(s): 4-20-75 Time Bird Seen: 11:30 AM off/on to 1:00 PM

Locality: Red Lion Wildlife Management area

Nearest Town: Red Lion (on map) County: Johan

Other observers who independently identified this bird:

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

Bob Andrews

Bill Lybarger

Van Remsen

Optical Equipment: 20x Bushnell scope

If photographed, type of equipment used: _____

Light Conditions: clear

Distance from bird (how measured): 30 ft + closer estimate

* Number of Birds Seen: 2 Sex: _____ Plumage: _____

Describe the bird's overall behavior and demeanor:

staying near ground much like Western Meadowlark

Describe in great detail the bird's size, overall shape, plumage and color-pattern. Include details on shape of bill, wings and tail. Give particular emphasis to the marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance in field guide descriptions is not enough. Describe what you actually saw in the field:

Very close in appearance to Western Meadowlark
mottled brown back + wings yellow breast with black
V face white undertail coverts white the tail
was brown in the center with white outer feather
inner feathers of the tail were observed at
close range with 20x scope and were black
along the rachis (see Robins Brown Zing Sing
Birds of North America p. 279 detail of
eastern + western tail feathers)

* at least 10 of these birds were observed in the
same area on 5-10-75 all were singing +
giving call note

(OVER)

Describe the bird's song or call, if heard, including method of delivery, i.e., from perch, in flight, etc:

song a four note slurred whistle given from ground or fence post also a very burry call note (brrrrt) very ~~so~~ buzzy quality

Describe the habitat in which you observed this bird:

long grass very damp

How were similarly appearing species eliminated?

Western Meadowlark does not have total black center to tail feather - also song more flute-like more varied does not give burry call note

Prior experience with this and similarly appearing species:

seen in east

Books, illustrations and advice consulted and how did these influence this documentation?

This report was written from notes made during _____ after ☒ observation; from memory _____

PRINT NAME: Steve Larson SIGNATURE: Steve Larson DATE: 5-18-75
Street Address: 20915 Eagle Way #7 Town and State: Boulder Colo ZIP: 80501

Return to: JACK REDDALL - 4450 South Alton Street, Englewood, Colorado 80110