

54-92-15

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COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

EASTERN MEADOWLARK
Sturnella magna

Location: Hammett State Wildlife Area (SWA); near Holly; Prowers County, Colorado

Date: July 26, 1992

This bird was discovered by Duane Nelson and seen by Joe Roller.

Setting:

Duane led me to this bird at Hammett SWA just inside Colorado on the Kansas border. This overgrown and open area consists of grassy and weedy fields along the north bank of the Arkansas River. There are scattered tamarisks growing where the Eastern Meadowlark was seen and just to the south was a bigger line of deciduous trees along the river. This area is about 400 yards west of the Kansas border. Many Western Meadowlarks use the area and we could hear their distinctive "chuck" note. The area is also used by Dickcissels and Field Sparrows. Both were singing on the afternoon on July 26. We observed the bird between 4:00 - 4:20 p.m. at distances of 40 feet - 100 yards. The weather was scattered clouds and viewing conditions were good. I observed the bird in 10X42 binoculars and at length, at closest range, in a Kowa 20-60X scope. In the scope, the bird perched facing away and looking back at us. I observed the back, face, crown stripe and tail in very close detail. I saw the individual tail feathers as the tail spread against a tamarisk twig spreading and bending the feathers to the side and upward.

Description and Similar Species:

The bird was chunky, about 8" long and clearly a meadowlark. It superficially looked like a Western Meadowlark. However I observed the bird through my scope and noted these differences: The head stripes (lateral crown and eyeline) were much darker, being nearly black with fine scattered brown specks. Those of the Western Meadowlark were paler brown in comparison. The superciliary may not have been whiter, but in contrast to the blackish eyeline and lateral crown stripe, this gave the bird a much more "stripe-faced" look than the Western Meadowlark. The yellow of the throat was more restricted than that of the Western meadowlark, not extending up onto the face past the lower angle of the lower mandible. The back was noticeably darker. The back feathers had blackish centers with narrow buffy-brown fringes. The individual tail feathers (the outer 4 on each side) appeared totally white, at close range. If there were brown spots they were so restricted as to not be visible to me.

No song was given but the call was distinctly different. The bird called often and repeatedly as it was disturbed and at rest in the tip of a tamarisk. I noted three calls. The most common was a dry, rasping "djit". This was almost identical in tone, intonation and duration to a single note of the Dickcissel 3-note song. It was higher, drier and of a completely different character than the lower, richer "chuck" call note of the Western Meadowlark. The bird also gave a high rising "dzerwee" call. This was similar in tone to the "djit" call but thinner, higher, lasting longer and rising. It was almost as thin as a cowbird squeak. The third call was a flight rattle which sounded like that of the Western Meadowlark.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many meadowlarks of both species. I compared Eastern and Western Meadowlarks in Kansas in July 1992.

This report is prepared from notes made during and after observation.

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