

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) Juniata County - July 1, 1997

On Tuesday, July 1, 1997, Robyn and I traveled to the Village of Center in Juniata County in search of the Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) that had been reported from there.

Description:

The bird was very similar to Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) in appearance. The yellow on the throat extended farther into the lower sides of the face than on Eastern Meadowlark. The brown streaking on the upper side of the Western Meadowlark appeared to be paler and outer tail feathers did not show as much white as Eastern Meadowlark. The outer tailed feathers appeared to be more dusky. Song completely different - more of a flute-like musical song.

Discussion:

We first heard the Western Meadowlark singing from the parking lot across from the Center Lutheran Church on the south side SR3002 at about 7:15 am. We heard it singing as soon as we stepped out of the car, but couldn't find it from there. It was singing off to the left just over a hill. It eventually moved farther left (east), so we drove down the road to see if there was another spot to get a good view of the field. We got permission from one of the Amish farmers to walk behind his buildings and there we had a distant view of the bird on one of his fence lines. It soon flew from there and continued farther east until it was out of sight. We left the farm and drove up to the Walker Township Building. We hadn't heard the bird sing now for about 20 minutes and were about ready to get back in the car when a meadowlark flew overhead and landed back on a fence post near the farm we had stopped at earlier.

It sang once, revealing its identity as Western. Behind the township building an Eastern Meadowlark was singing, the only direct comparison that we had of the two species. The Western Meadowlark immediately took off again and flew back to the field behind the church parking lot. We jumped in the car and drove back down to the church where we finally got good views of the bird. The meadowlark entertained us there for quite a while, flying from one fence post to another, while we watched it in the scope and listened to its song.

The Western Meadowlark is very similar to the Eastern Meadowlark in size, structure and plumage. There are some subtle plumage differences, but the real key is the song. The Western's song is a throaty, musical, almost flutelike song compared to the plaintive song of Eastern Meadowlark. There was a Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla ustelina*) singing from the woods across the field from the farm where we first saw the meadowlark. Every time the thrush sang, the first few notes would cause us to pause and listen because the quality of those first few notes was similar to that of the Western Meadowlark. I find it difficult to describe the bird's song in words. However, Robyn and I were both familiar with the song, having once stayed for a

week at her brother's home outside of Colorado Springs, Colorado, where we woke up daily to the serenade of a Western Meadowlark.

Although I did not have direct visible comparison of Eastern and Western Meadowlarks, I made a point to study several Eastern Meadowlarks later that afternoon near our home in Cumberland County. The yellow on the face of Eastern Meadowlarks was restricted to just the throat. There was a distinct line dividing the yellow throat from the gray on the sides of the face. On the Western Meadowlark the separation was more diffuse, allowing the yellow to bleed onto the side of the face. One other striking difference (other than the song) was the brightness of the white in the outer tail feathers on the Eastern Meadowlarks in flight compared to the duller, duskiest outer tail feathers of the Western Meadowlark.

These observations were made with both Zeiss 10x40 binoculars and with a Kowa TSN-2 spotting scope in good light.

References:

National Geographic Society. 1987. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 2nd ed.
National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.

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858-01 - 1997

Western Meadowlark: *Sturnella neglecta*

A Western Meadowlark was reported to the Central Pennsylvania Birdline on 28 June 1997. It was being observed in a field near Center, Juniata County Pennsylvania. I visited the locality on 4 July 1997 and managed to videotape the bird (mostly to get its characteristic song the image is not clear enough for identification of it). I have enclosed a copy of this videotaped bird and its song for review by PORC. It is clearly the song of a Western Meadowlark

The bird looks like a typical Eastern Meadowlark except it does have the yellow of the throat extending in toward the cheek of the bird. It has a long, pointed beak and a line drawn along the top of the beak to the forehead of the bird would appear to be almost a straight line (i.e., it has a flat-looking head). The head has black stripes and eyeline, There is a pronounced black V on its chest. The flanks have elongated spots and it has a yellowish belly. The back and wings are largely striped or mottled with brown and yellow. The outer tail feathers are white there is a black edging on at least some of them (this could only be seen when the bird was perched and the tail was largely folded up). I could not really determine if the bird in question was actually paler or grayer than an Eastern Meadowlark I would have to have the two of them side-by-side for comparison to really determine that feature. The videotape may provide a clue to this if it is compared to a tape of an Eastern Meadowlark.

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)

Date of Sighting: 1 July 1997 to 1 July 1997

Location: CENTER

County: JUNIATA

Observer(s): Don Henise; Mark McConaughy

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Don Henise; Mark McConaughy

Written Description: YES

Photo: NO

Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas			X					
P. Schwalbe			X					
K. Parkes			X					
R. Ickes			X					
P. Hess			X					
J. McWilliams				X				
T. Floyd			X					
TOTALS			6	1				
DECISION			X					

Comments:

See Hess' comments.

Signature (Secretary):

F. C. Haas

Date:

4-19-99

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)

Date of Sighting: 28 June 1997 to 1 July 1997

Location: CENTER

County: JUNIATA

Observer(s): Mark McConaughy, Nick Pulcinella

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Mark McConaughy, Nick Pulcinella

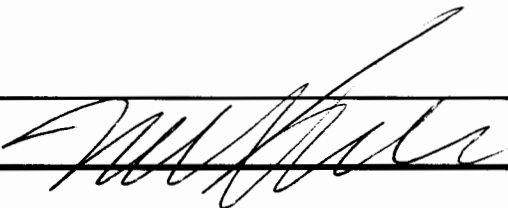
WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO NO SPECIMEN NO Record, Video + Audio

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman					X			
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess	X							
R. Ickes	X							
J. McWilliams	X							
B. Reid	X							
P. Rodewald	X							
TOTALS	5				1			1
DECISION	X							

Comments: Previously accepted as Class III

5-1-1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

9/18/00