

GENERAL NOTES

The Wintering Meadowlarks of Dane County, Wisconsin.—The 1931 edition of the A.O.U. Check-List states that the Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) winters casually east to southern Wisconsin. Actually this species is a regular winter resident in considerable numbers, especially in Green County most of which was originally prairie. On the basis of sight identification, the western bird appeared to be the prevailing winter resident. My main interest was the winter status of the Western Meadowlark in comparison with the Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*). In order to obtain positive data, I collected 8 Meadowlarks between December 29 and February 26 during the four winters, 1949–50 through 1952–53. Seven of the specimens were of the western bird and one the eastern. All were males. The sample is too small to generalize on the sex ratio and the relative abundance of the two species. It appears, however, from the specimens and sight identifications that the Eastern Meadowlark constitutes less than 10 per cent of the wintering population.

Sight identification of the two species can only be positive within narrow limits. When the ground is completely covered with snow, Meadowlarks are forced to feed where manure has been piled or scattered in the fields and especially along the roads where the snow-plows lay bare the shoulders. The birds become so accustomed to traffic that it is usually easy, by slow driving, to pass within 10 to 20 feet of the feeding birds. The species can then be determined by the color of the back. At a distance the backs of both species appear dark, and the observer is inclined to assign the birds to the more darkly colored eastern species. Under the distance limitations imposed, all of the specimens taken were correctly identified prior to collecting.

The stomachs of the collected specimens showed that they were living very largely on corn and oats. The stomach of the Eastern Meadowlark, collected February 21, 1952, was filled with corn. It was very fat and weighed 121.2 grams. Molt was in progress on the breast. The Western Meadowlarks weighed from 93.3 to 119.8 grams, the average being 108.0 grams. Fat when present was confined largely to the neck area. The stomach contents of a specimen taken December 30, 1951, were mainly oats but a few insects were present. Professor Edwin W. King identified the insect fragments as representing: 6 curculionids, subfamily Otiiorhynchinae; 1 hemipteran; and a lepidopterous larva.

I have no positive information that the two species associate at any time. On December 30, 1951, I saw a Western Meadowlark feeding with a mixed flock of Starlings, Red-wings, and Cowbirds.

No accurate data on the wintering populations and their losses could be obtained. On November 29, 1950, a flock of 32 Meadowlarks was found at Pine Bluff, 20 of which were sufficiently close to be identifiable as the western species. This flock disappeared and could not be found during the remainder of the winter. The winter of 1950–51 was marked by deep snow and some low temperatures. On January 17, 1951, I drove from Madison southward through Monroe to the Illinois state line, a distance of 52 miles. I counted 21 Meadowlarks in Dane County and 13 in Green County. The night of January 30 the temperature dropped to 37° below zero at Truax Field, Madison. The above route was covered again on February 21 and only one Meadowlark was seen. It would be a mistake to assume that nearly all of these birds had perished. In spite of the limitations on feeding grounds imposed by the snow and the marked tendency of small flocks to adhere to a limited area, it was impossible to locate the birds at will. I have made a round trip of twenty miles over a stretch of road during a forenoon without seeing a Meadowlark though I knew the exact places along the road that were used. A trip in the afternoon of the same day might reveal all or a part of the number wintering.

In winter of 1950-51, I selected a circuit, 44 miles in length, that was covered repeatedly. The maximum count of 16 Meadowlarks was obtained December 31, 1950. This number dwindled to two birds seen on February 22, and again on February 23. This represents a potential loss of 88 per cent. I doubt if the true loss was this high. What causes an initially high or low wintering population is uncertain. Field observations indicate that a November snowstorm will hold most of the Meadowlarks present at the time. The pleasant, prolonged fall of 1952 was followed by an exceptionally mild winter; however, during the entire winter I was unable to find in the county more than four Western Meadowlarks, all in one flock.—A. W. SCHORGER, 168 N. Prospect Ave., Madison, Wisconsin.

The Ipswich Sparrow (*Passerculus princeps*) on Chesapeake Bay, Virginia.—The presence of the Ipswich Sparrow in winter on the coast of Virginia has long been known, but because of its highly selective habitat its exact status has never been accurately determined. For example, Rives termed it "common in winter at Cobb's Island" (A Catalogue of the Birds of the Virginias, 1890: 73); and according to Grey, from Cape Henry south to the North Carolina line there are only four definite records (Raven, 21: 93, 1950). Murray summarizes the few records available and states that it is a "scarce winter visitor on the coast" (A Check-list of the Birds of Virginia, 1952: 107). Therefore it comes as a surprise to discover that it is apparently a regular but highly local transient and winter visitor on certain parts of the western shore of Chesapeake Bay.

Away from the immediate coast the Ipswich Sparrow was first seen in Virginia at Seaford, York County, on November 25, 1949, by Dr. John H. Grey, Jr., Charles E. Stevens, and the writer. Because of the unusual nature of this record the writer returned on December 2 and collected what was presumably the same bird. This specimen is now in the collection of the U. S. National Museum. Since that first record, individual birds have been recorded once or more each winter by several observers, including, in addition to the above named, R. J. Beasley and R. A. Glassel. All records thus far have been on the immediate Bay shore between Hampton Roads (lower James River) and York River, locally known as the Lower Peninsula. Generally, only one or two birds are recorded on any one trip, but on January 23, 1953, Grey and the writer found three together at Grandview, Hampton (formerly Elizabeth City) County. Returning to this area on January 30, the same observers made a careful census along three miles of Bay shore from Grandview north to Northend Point. At least seven Ipswich Sparrows were seen on this census, of which two were collected, far more than have been reported on any single day even on the coast of Virginia.

The almost exclusive habitat of this species on the coast is the grass-covered sand dunes and the beaches of the outer barrier islands. On the western shore of southern Chesapeake Bay the habitat is similar in character but far different in scope. The dunes here, in the few places they occur, range from about 20 to 100 feet (rarely 300 feet) in depth, separating the narrow Bay beach from extensive salt marshes. It is rare to find a dune here rising over 10 feet above the beach. The Ipswich Sparrows usually prefer the grassy stretches of the dunes, although they frequently visit the tidal debris on the beach to feed, often in company with Savannah Sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*). Occasionally, when flushed from the dune grass, they will fly into the bushy edges of the salt marshes.

The sudden abundance of records for this species on Chesapeake Bay should not be construed to mean that it has recently extended its range. Rather, this probably indicates merely an increase of field work where little has been done previously.—FREDERIC R. SCOTT, 27 Malvern Avenue, Richmond 21, Virginia.