

transcribing the song in the clumsy medium of musical notation. Like a violin virtuoso, he does things that set the five line staff completely at a loss. Nor is it necessary that he conform to a man-made sequence of whole and half tones which our system of musical notation is designed to express (not all peoples' do). Still, there may be recognized in some of the bird's performances a sequence of intervals that do fairly closely conform. With a degree of compression and resultant distortion, the fundamental structure of the song may be noted on the musical staff. The result is a mere "black and white still" of a rainbow-colored fountain of sound that defies capture and imprisonment, but the record does aid the memory and perhaps it will extend our appreciation of its variety.



One spring my class in biology had a goodly sprinkling of music majors among its members. The project of notation of Meadowlark songs was therefore undertaken as a scheme for "correlation of subjects" in the curriculum. One of my colleagues has strongly urged that some of the results of this effort be made public. Hence the following notes are offered. Observations were made during the spring semester and were restricted to an area of approximately forty acres in a newly annexed district of level land within the city of Los Angeles. Open fields and native vegetation were but slightly modified—just enough to supply ideal "singing posts" for an abundant Meadowlark population. Nine distinct "melodies" were noted (see figure).

On two occasions during my own contacts with the species I have heard perfect melodic sequences that suffered no distortion when spread upon the musical staff. In both cases there was extreme simplification through reduction of grace notes and glides. They are recorded in Nos. 10 and 11 of the figure. Both were delivered at the height of the breeding season and were therefore presumably birds of at least one year's age. One of the records is the simplest Meadowlark song that has come into my experience.—LOYE MILLER, *University of California, Berkeley, May 13, 1951.*

The song of the Alder Flycatcher.—I have known the Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii traillii*) for many years—since 1885, when I called it Traill's Flycatcher, to be exact—and I have heard its song as recently as this summer of 1951. I was much interested in Mr. McCabe's description of its flight song in *The Wilson Bulletin* (1951,

63:89-98)—something I have never been so fortunate as to hear. I was also interested in his discussion of the regular song, and, not being acquainted with it as it is given by Midwestern birds, I have no reason to disbelieve in his main thesis as to the difference between Eastern and Midwestern singers. My observations have been confined to the East—Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Quebec Labrador—but I think I am in a position to criticize McCabe's table of phonetic expressions of the song because I have paid particular attention to the syllabification of birds' songs since 1895. In that year my journal recorded that hitherto I had been content with William Brewster's *ké-wing* (perhaps learned in conversation with Mr. Brewster), but on hearing the song near at hand in June at Londonderry, Vt., I found Dr. Dwight's rendering in Chapman's "Handbook of Birds . . ." very nearly exact, though I amended it to *wee-zeé-up* with the *up* very faint. I recorded this in *The Auk* (1902. 19:84-85). I also summarized this note in a communication to Bent's "Life Histories" (1942. *U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 179:210). In McCabe's search for published "phonetic expressions," which was by no means exhaustive, it is not strange that this note of mine should have been overlooked. I mention it here only because I think it important to note that the final so-called syllable is faintly uttered.

This leads me to ask just what constitutes a syllable in a bird's song. In studying McCabe's table I could not help thinking that the difference between his three-syllable and two-syllable songs was sometimes a mere matter of the use of a hyphen by the human recorder. As an example, there is Saunders' *tick-weeah*, which McCabe calls a two-syllable song, though if the describer had happened to insert a hyphen after the *ee*—where one would really have expected to find one, *weeah* not constituting a normal syllable in the English language—he would have placed it in the three-syllable category. It seems to me that these so-called third syllables of this bird's song are really only downward inflections in the second syllables. In almost every case quoted this so-called syllable begins with a vowel, without the sharp break that would be indicated by a consonant, such as we hear in the *chick-a-dee-dee* of *Parus atricapillus*.

I am convinced that as most of us hear the Alder Flycatcher's song it is largely a matter of distance how we render it. On the island of Cape Breton, N. S., in the summer of 1951 I heard this song many times. It seemed to be always a two-syllable song, but it was too far away and in a place too difficult of access for me to hear it distinctly, and I feel pretty sure that if I had been nearer, I should have heard that downward inflection that some have called a third syllable.

Another element enters into the situation. In all syllabifications of birds' songs the personal equation enters, and McCabe sums this up very well in the first paragraph of his Summary. It has always seemed to me that some syllabifiers are too prone to rest content with what strikes them at first as a fairly good rendering, and do not listen again and again to the song to make sure they cannot improve upon it. This was my own case in my earlier years of observation. As a matter of fact, of course, birds do not sing in human syllables. Their consonants do not begin or end what we call syllables. When they exist at all, they run all the way through them. Nevertheless, this syllabification is an important adjunct to our descriptions of certain songs. Our attempts at imitation of the originals will assist our own memories and may often help other observers.

Unfortunately there is a rather disturbing number of inaccuracies in McCabe's table of "Phonetic Expressions." Some of these are in the localities named, where he seems to have assumed that the place of publication or the residence of the authority was the locality of observation. In other cases he has failed to go back to the original record, and

in still other cases no explanation is evident. I am not sure that I have caught them all, but such as I have detected with the help of my own small library I must note here. The authority for *ee-zee-e-ŭp* is really Dwight in Chapman's "Handbook of Birds . . ." (1895 and later editions) and the locality must have been New York or New England or both, not Washington, D. C. The Minot reference should be to H. D. Minot's "Land-Birds and Game-Birds of New England" (1876, Salem, Mass., and second edition edited by Brewster, 1895, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston and New York), with New England for locality. Widmann's locality was presumably Missouri, where he lived, instead of Indiana. The *greadeal* of Miller should be *grea'deal* (with the apostrophe), and his original publication of it was in *The Auk* (1903, 20:68), where he says he adopted it from P. B. Peabody, who lived in Minnesota, while Miller himself lived in New Jersey. Silloway's post of observation at the time seems to have been Illinois, not Massachusetts. Saunders' locality must have included New England as well as New York. Hoffmann's name is misspelled, and his locality was New England, where he lived, as well as New York. Bent lives in Massachusetts, but his ornithological work has not been confined to that state.

I am sorry to have to call attention to these minor errors. I leave it to readers of McCabe's paper to consider how seriously they affect his general conclusions if at all. To my mind they are of little importance in comparison with my more fundamental criticism of this part of his paper, but their occurrence in what seems to be an important contribution to ornithology needs notice as a warning to readers—and also as a warning to other workers in the vineyard!

To close these comments on an affirmative note, I should like to call attention to the renderings of the song by the describer of the subspecies *E. t. alnorum*, and author of the present vernacular name, William Brewster, in his posthumous "Birds of the Lake Umbagog Region of Maine," (1937. *Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool.*, 66 (pt. 3):496). Here we have *quee-quee* and *quee-queer*, and it should be remembered that Brewster was a New-Englander to whom the final *r* would be silent, contributing only the falling inflection to that second syllable. This might take the place of the *ké-wing* attributed to Brewster earlier in this note. And it is interesting that these records of Brewster's were made in the type locality of the subspecies that may have to be restored to the Check-List. —FRANCIS H. ALLEN, 9 Francis Ave., Cambridge 38, Massachusetts, October 22, 1951.

Swainson's Warbler in Prospect Park, Kings County, New York.—In recent years Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) has been recorded as breeding in Maryland (Stewart and Robbins, 1947. *Auk*, 64:272), Delaware (Meanley, 1950. *Wilson Bulletin*, 62:93-94), and West Virginia (Brooks and Legg, 1942. *Auk*, 59:76-86). As with many other species, the extension of a breeding range is frequently concurrent with casual observations in areas where the bird has never before appeared. I wish to report the bird from southeastern New York.

On May 5, 1950, during a drizzling rain, Geoffrey Carleton discovered a Swainson's Warbler on the muddy margin of a small pond in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. Knowing that it was an unusual species, he watched it for some time. In its search for food it turned up dead leaves in the manner of a Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*). Carleton telephoned Dr. W. T. Helmuth 3rd, who rushed to the scene and observed the interesting bird from about 6:30 p.m. until dark. The warbler infrequently gave a thin, sweet *tsip* but it did not sing.

The following morning several observers carefully searched for the bird in the immediate vicinity of the pond. Eventually, Robert Grant and I relocated it about 500 yards