stout. Claws arched, compressed, acute, that of the hind toe large. Plumage rather compact. Upper eyelid margined with strong bristles. Wings of moderate length, broad; the second, third, and fourth quills longest; one of the inner secondaries nearly as long when the wing is closed. Tail short, much rounded, of twelve acute feathers.

THE MEADOW LARK, OR MEADOW STARLING.

+*STURNELLA LUDOVICIANÆ*, Linn.

PLATE CCXXIII.—MALE, FEMALE, AND NEST.

How could I give the history of this beautiful bird, were I not to return for awhile to the spot where I have found it most abundant, and where the most frequent opportunities occurred of observing it? Then, reader, to those rich grass fields let us stray. We are not far from the sandy sea-shores of the Jerseys; the full beauties of an early spring are profusely spread around us; the glorious sun illumines the creation with a flood of golden light, as he yet lies beneath the deep; the industrious bee is yet asleep, as are the birds in bush and tree; the small wavelets break on the beach with a gentle murmur; the sky is so beautifully blue, that, on seeing it, one fancies himself near heaven; the moon is about to disappear in the distant west; the limpid dew-drops hang on every leaf, bud and blossom, each tall blade of grass bending under the weight. Anxious to view Nature at her best, I lie waiting in pleasure for the next moment:—it has come; all is life and energy; the bee, the bird, the quadruped, all nature awakes into life, and every being seems moving in the light of the Divine countenance. Fervently do I praise the God who has called me into existence, and devotedly do I pursue my avocations, carefully treading on the tender grass, until I reach a seat by nature's own hand prepared, when I pause, survey, admire, and essay to apprehend all—yes, *all* around me! Delightful days of my youth, when full of strength, health and gladness, I so often enjoyed the bliss of contemplating the beauties of creation! They are gone, never to return; but memory fondly cherishes the thoughts which they called into being, and while life remains will their memory be pleasing.

See the Lark that arrived last evening! fully refreshed, and with a bosom

RJ

Meadow Starling or Meadow Lark.

1 Males. 2 Females and Nest.

Yellow flowered Gerardia

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon F.R.S. & L.S.

Litho Printed & Col'd by J. T. Bowen Philad.

overflowing with love towards her who had led him thus far, he rises from his grassy couch, and on gently whirring pinions launches into the air, in the glad hope of finding the notes of his beloved fall on his ear. The male is still on the wing; his notes sound loud and clear as he impatiently surveys the grassy plain beneath him. His beloved is not there. His heart almost fails him, and, disappointed, he rises towards the black walnut-tree, under which, during many a summer's heat, the mowers have enjoyed both their repast and their mid-day rest. I now see him, not desponding as you might suppose, but vexed and irritated. See how he spreads his tail, how often he raises his body, how he ejaculates his surprise, and loudly calls for her whom of all things he best loves.—Ah!—there comes the dear creature; her timorous, tender notes announce her arrival. Her mate, her beloved, has felt the charm of her voice. His wings are spread, and buoyant with gladness, he flies to meet, to welcome her, anticipating all the bliss prepared for him. Would that I could interpret to you, reader, as I feel them, the many assurances of friendship, fidelity and love that at this precious moment pass from the one to the other, as they place their bills together and chatter their mutual loves!—the gentle chidings of the male for the sorrow her delay has caused him, and the sweet words she uses to calm his ardour. Alas! it were vain to attempt it. I have listened to the talk, it is true; I have witnessed all their happiness; but I cannot describe it to you. You, reader, must watch them, as I have done, if you wish to understand their language. If not, I must try to give you a taste of what I would willingly impart, were I competent to the task, and proceed to relate what I have observed of their habits.

When the Meadow Lark first rises from the ground, which it does with a smart spring, it flutters like a young bird, then proceeds checking its speed and resuming it in a desultory and uncertain manner, flying in general straight forward, and glancing behind as if to ascertain the amount of its danger, but yet affording an easy aim to the most inexperienced marksman. When pursued for awhile, it moves more swiftly, sailing and beating its wings alternately, until it gets out of reach. It will not stand before the pointer longer than a moment, and that only when surprised among rank weeds or grasses. During its migrations, which are usually performed by day, it rises above the tallest forest trees, passing along in loose bodies, and not unfrequently in flocks of from fifty to a hundred individuals. At such times its motions are continued, and it merely sails at intervals, to enable it to breathe and renew its exertions. Now and then, one may be seen making directly towards another, chasing it downwards or horizontally away from the group, uttering all the time a sharp querulous note, and keeping up the pursuit for a distance of several hundred yards, when it suddenly abandons

it. Both birds then rejoin the flock, and the party continue their journey in amity. When flocks thus travelling spy a favourable feeding place, they gradually descend and alight on some detached tree, when, as if by one accord, each individual jerks out its tail, springs on its legs, and utters a loud soft call-note. They then fly successively to the ground, and immediately proceed in search of food. An old male now and then erects itself, glances its eye around with anxious scrutiny, and should danger be perceived, does not fail to inform his party by emitting a loud rolling note, on hearing which the rest of the flock become alert, and hold themselves in readiness to depart.

In this manner the Meadow Larks proceed in autumn from the northern parts of Maine to the State of Louisiana, the Floridas, or Carolinas, where they abound during the winter. At this season the pine barrens of the Floridas are filled with them, and after the land has been fired by the native herdsmen, these birds become as sooty as the Sparrows residing in London. Some were so infested with ticks as to have lost almost all the feathers off their body, and in general they appeared much smaller than those of the Atlantic States, probably on account of the deficiency of their plumage. In the prairies of the Opellousas and those bordering on the Arkansas river, they are still more abundant. Many of these, however, retire into Texas and Mexico at the approach of very severe weather. They now sleep on the ground among the tall grass, but at a distance of many yards from each other, in the manner of the Carolina Dove.

At the approach of spring, the flocks break up, the females first separating. The males then commence their migration, flying in small flocks, or even sometimes singly. At this season the beauty of their plumage is much improved, their movements have acquired more grace, their manner of flight and all their motions when on the ground evidently shewing how strongly they feel the passion that glows in their bosom. The male is seen to walk with stately measured steps, jerking out his tail, or spreading it to its full extent, and then closing it, like a fan in the hands of some fair damsel. Its loud notes are more melodious than ever, and are now frequently heard, the bird sitting the while on the branch of a tree, or the top of some tall weed of the meadows.

Woe to the rival who dares to make his appearance! Nay, should any male come in sight, he is at once attacked, and, if conquered, chased beyond the limits of the territory claimed by the first possessor. Several males may sometimes be seen engaged in fierce conflict, although these frays seldom last more than a few moments. The sight of a single female at once changes their occupation, and after her they all fly off as if mad. The female exhibits the usual timidity of her sex, that timidity without which, even in Meadow Larks, she would probably fail in finding a mate. As he flies towards her,

uttering the softest of his notes, she moves off in such a manner that her ardent admirer often seems doubtful whether she means to repel or encourage him. At length, however, he is permitted to go nearer, to express by his song and courteous demeanour the strength and constancy of his passion. She accepts him as her lord, and in a few days both are seen busily searching for an appropriate spot in which to rear their young.

At the foot of some tuft of tall strong grass you find the nest. A cavity is scooped out of the ground, and in it is placed a quantity of grass, fibrous roots, and other materials, circularly disposed so as to resemble an oven, around which leaves and the blades of the surrounding grasses are matted together so as to cover and conceal it. The entrance admits only one at a time, but both birds incubate. The eggs are four or five, pure white, sprinkled and blotched with reddish-brown, mostly towards the larger end. The young are out towards the end of June, and follow their parents for some weeks afterwards. These birds are unremitting in their attention towards each other, and in the care of their offspring, and while the female sits, the male not only supplies her with food, but constantly comforts her by his song and the watchfulness which he displays. Should one approach the nest, he immediately rises on wing, passes and repasses in circles over and around the spot in which the nest is, and thus frequently leads to the hidden treasure.

Excepting Hawks and Snakes, the Meadow Lark has few enemies at this season. The prudent and enlightened farmer, mindful of the benefit his meadows have received from the destruction of thousands of larvæ, which might have greatly injured his grass, disturbs it not, and should he find its nest while cutting his hay, he leaves the tuft in which it is placed. Even young children seldom destroy this bird or its brood.

It must not, however, be supposed that the Meadow Lark is entirely harmless. In the Carolinas, many well instructed planters agree in denouncing it as a depredator, alleging that it scratches up oat seeds when sown early in spring, and is fond of plucking up the young corn, the wheat, the rye, or the rice.

In confinement, this bird has another fault. Dr. SAMUEL WILSON of Charleston told me that one of the Meadow Larks which he had purchased in the market, with a number of other birds, had been found feeding on the body of a Bay-winged Bunting, which it had either killed, or found dead in the aviary. He said he had watched the bird more than twenty minutes, and plainly saw that it plunged its bill into the flesh of the Finch to its eyes, and appeared to open and close it alternately, as if sucking the juices of the flesh. Two days afterwards, the same Meadow Lark actually killed two other Finches that had their wings clipped, and ate them.

During the latter part of autumn, as well as in winter, this species affords a good deal of sport, especially to young gunners, some of whom speak highly of its flesh. This may be true respecting the young, but the yellow oily appearance of the flesh of the old ones, its toughness, and the strong smell of insects which it emits, prevent it from being an agreeable article of food. They are nevertheless offered for sale in almost all our markets.

In the winter months, this bird frequently associates with the Carolina Dove, several species of Grakle, and even Partridges; is fond of spending its time in corn-fields after the grain has been gathered, and often makes its appearance in the cattle-yard of the planters. In Virginia it is called the "Old-field Lark."

While on the ground, the Meadow Lark walks well, and much in the manner of the Grakle and the European Starling, to which it is in some measure allied. When on the wing, they seldom fly close enough to allow more than one to be shot at a time. When wounded, they run off with alacrity, and hide with great care, so as to be found with difficulty. They alight with equal readiness on trees, on the branches of which they walk with ease, on fences, and even at times on out-houses. Their food consists of grass seeds, and grains of almost every sort, along with all kinds of insects and berries. Although gregarious, they seldom move close together while on the ground, and, on the report of a gun, you may see perhaps a hundred of them rise on the wing from different parts of a field. They are never found in close woods. During winter, the open western prairies abound with them, and in every corn-field in the State of Kentucky you are sure to find them in company with Partridges and Doves. They now and then resort to roads, for the purpose of dusting themselves, and move along the edge of the water in order to bathe.

This beautiful bird is dispersed over all the countries intervening between the shores of the Columbia river and the Gulf of Mexico. I found it very abundant and breeding on the Island of Galveston in the Texas, where, as well as in our Southern States, it is a constant resident. It travels northward as far as the Saskatchewan river, where, according to Dr. RICHARDSON, it arrives about the first of May, but beyond which it was not seen. In a note appended to the article on this bird in the *Fauna Boreali-Americana*, Mr. SWAINSON says it "is subject to very considerable variation, not only in its colour, but in its size, and in the proportionate length of the bill. The northern specimens are larger and much paler than those we possess from Georgia, while the Pennsylvania ones are intermediate between the two, proving the influence of climate or the prevalence of particular races." This note is in perfect accordance with my views as regards the migrations of birds, and it corroborates the fact which I have already mentioned, that the

larger, and consequently the stronger, birds are those which remove farthest north in spring. The difference as to size and colour acknowledged to exist in this species, may be observed in a greater or less degree in almost every bird; and I am fully convinced that a great number of young birds, as well as females, have been converted into distinct species, through the lamentable epidemic mania which has infected the closet-naturalists, who found their fame on the invention of useless names. The eggs of the Meadow Lark are an inch and two-twelfths in length, and seven-eighths in breadth.

MEADOW LARK, *Alauda magna*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iii. p. 20.

STURNUS LUDOVICIANUS, Bonap. Syn.

STURNUS LUDOVICIANUS, *Crescent Starlet*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 282.

AMERICAN STARLING OR MEADOW LARK, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 147.

MEADOW LARK OR AMERICAN STARLING, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 216; vol. v. p. 492.

Breeds from Texas to the Columbia river, and along the Atlantic coast to Nova Scotia and the Fur Countries. Resident in the Southern and Western States. Abundant.

Upper parts variegated with dark brown, bay, and dull yellowish, the latter bordering the feathers; those of the hind parts of the back barred, as are the secondary quills and their coverts; primary quills dark brown, margined, the outer with whitish, the rest with pale yellowish; edge of the wing yellow; three outer tail-feathers white, with a dash of black on the outer web near the end, the next feather also more or less white, and barred on the outer web; on the upper part of the head a central and two lateral bands of brownish-yellow, the lateral band sometimes white, anteriorly tinged with yellow; sides of the head and neck greyish-white, flanks and lower tail-coverts reddish-white, streaked with black; fore neck and breast rich yellow, the former with a large crescent of black. Female smaller, but otherwise similar.

Male, $11\frac{2}{12}$, $16\frac{1}{2}$.

In an adult male preserved in spirits, the roof of the mouth has a median ridge anteriorly, with two ridges on the palate, which is convex and ascending; the posterior aperture of the nares linear, margined with large papillæ, and 8 twelfths long. The tongue is slender, 10 twelfths long, deeply sagittate and papillate at the base, concave above, horny beneath, with a median groove, thin-edged, lacerated toward the tip, which is slit to the depth of 1 twelfth. It resembles the tongue of the Quiscali, Starlings, Crows, and Thrushes. The œsophagus, *a b c*, is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, very narrow, its average width along the neck being $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths; on entering the thorax it enlarges

to 3 twelfths; the proventriculus, *b c*, is 5 twelfths in breadth, its glandular belt 6 twelfths. The stomach, *c d e*, is a very strong muscular gizzard, placed obliquely, of an elliptical form, 11 twelfths in length, $9\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in breadth. The proventricular glands are large, nearly globular, $\frac{1}{2}$ twelfth in diameter. The muscular coat of the stomach is rather thin, the thickness of the lateral muscles being 2 twelfths; the epithelium dense, tough, dark red, with three longitudinal rugæ on each side. The contents of the stomach are remains of insects, larvæ, and especially legs of grasshoppers. The intestine, *e f g h i j*, is of moderate length and width, the former being $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches, the latter averaging $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths. The duodenum, *e f*, curves in the usual manner at the distance of $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and is 3 twelfths wide. The cœca, *i*, come off at the distance of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches from the extremity, and are 3 twelfths in length, 1 twelfth in width, and obtuse; the cloaca, *j*, is small and of an oblong form, its breadth 5 twelfths.

The trachea is 3 inches long, flattened, firm, of the nearly uniform width of 2 twelfths. The rings are 68, with two dimidiate, rather broad and firm. There are four pairs of inferior laryngeal muscles besides the sterno-tracheal, and the lateral muscles are of moderate size. The bronchi are rather narrow, of 18 half rings.

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