

WHO ARE THEY?

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(Note: This is the first of a series of "Who's Who" to be written by Mrs. Hubbard. Ed.)

WHEN one first becomes interested in birds the big problem "Who's Who?" seems almost insoluble. As soon as a few birds have been identified the task becomes easier. The new bird bears a resemblance to some bird already identified with regard to shape, legs, beak, flight or one of many other characteristics. One then says, "I'll look for this bird among the ducks, or the hawks, or the blackbirds or the sparrows."

Let us consider one group of birds many of whose number come back early in spring. This group includes the blackbirds, orioles and meadowlarks.

The earliest of this group to come back in the spring is the Western Meadowlark with his yellow breast, black necklace and brown striped back. He's a true prairie bird. He comes early and sings thru snow-storm and rain, shower, heat and cold. He greets you sweetly from some fencepost as you travel by on country road or highway. Sitting there hunched up with drooping tail and long-pointed bill, he bears no resemblance to an opera star but when he opens his beak all are charmed.

Frequently we hear reports of blackbirds being seen in January, February or late fall. Unless these are clearly identified as a Brewer's Blackbird, Red-winged or the like I usually think, "Just another European Starling." The European Starling can be separated from our American blackbirds even at a casual glance by its dumpy appearance and short tail. And it does not seem to migrate (or very far). It sticks around towns and cities during the

winter living on garbage or anything else it can pick up. So if someone tells you of seeing a blackbird in winter, investigate—it's probably a European Starling—ours go south in winter.

The birds in this group (blackbirds, orioles, and meadowlarks) don't vary much in size; most of them have the long-pointed beak of the Meadow Lark, and nearly all of them have a short metallic single call-note that says "blackbird" before you see them.

Quite a few birds in this group can be identified just by their names. The Yellow-headed Blackbird; the Red-winged Blackbird; the Bronzed Grackle (it's the largest of the bunch with long u-shaped tail and yellow eyes); the Cowbird (small, with brown head and short bill, and frequently to be seen near horses or cattle). The Brewer's and Rusty Blackbirds can be distinguished only with difficulty. They are both black and about the same size as the Red-winged Blackbird. Outside of slight variations in shading of the females, the female of the Brewer's has brown eyes while the female of the Rusty has yellow eyes like the males. Talking of females Mrs. Red-wing and Mrs. Yellow-headed Blackbird aren't black at all but brownish striped birds.

The Bobolink male is striking black and white; the orange and black Baltimore Oriole is our common oriole on the Prairies, and the rarely seen Scarlet Tanager with its brilliant red and contrasting black wings and tail is not likely to be confused with other birds.