

Further Observations of Distraction Display of the Western Meadowlark

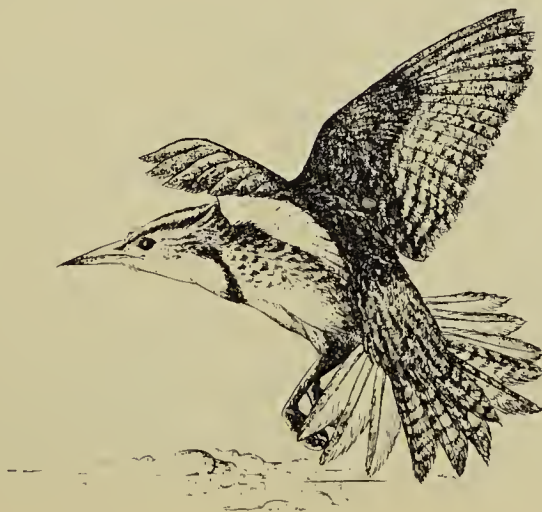
by Sam Alberts, Brooks, Alberta

A year ago I wrote concerning the distraction display of the Western Meadowlark (**Blue Jay** 18:9). I would like to make a few further comments on observations that I made this past summer of a similar display. The nest I found this year was on the shoulder of a graded road, and as I was irrigating a field of grain along this road I had a chance to see the nest several times every day. I was rather surprised the first time I got the mother bird up from the nest that I should again find a meadowlark making a distraction display. The act this bird put on could hardly be called a "broken-wing act," but rather a "broken-leg" or even an "act-with-only-one-leg". The nest was about two feet down on the road shoulder and in a small bunch of sage brush and grass. On leaving the nest the bird would fly up and onto the clean road bed, stop a second, make a couple of chirps, then always go up the road to the north. She would drag herself along on the ground, with both wings up in the air, for a distance of about fifty feet. It was indeed a very good act and it was only when the bird would alight upon a fence post that one could see that she had both legs.

My thoughts were that if a bird would do such a good act when only sitting on the eggs she would do a much better act when she had the young ones in the nest. It did not occur to me that after the eggs had

hatched the mother bird would not have time to be sitting on the nest. After the eggs hatched she was only on the nest once in several times when I stopped. She probably had also become accustomed to me bothering around as she did not at this time do much of an act. There were five eggs in the nest when I found it on June 22, and on July 3, four hatched out; the other egg did not hatch. On July 13, I visited the nest about eleven o'clock and decided that I should get some pictures that afternoon when the sun would be the best. However, during the noon hour the road grading crew moved in to rebuild the road and by the time I realized what was being done they had made the first round. When I drove up to where the nest had been I could see the mother bird sitting on the fence post with her bill full of insects but nothing to feed them to. I kicked around in the dirt and found the four small birds dead.

I also watched another meadowlark nest that I had found June 17, with six eggs in it, and at no time did the mother bird make a distraction display. I visited this nest every day and although it was very well hidden, when I visited it on June 25 the eggs were gone. It didn't look as if a straw had been moved. Although the two nests that I watched were both lost there has been a very heavy concentration of meadowlarks around here this fall.



Sketch by Ralph Carson

Western Meadowlark (from photos and description by Alberts).