

ROD AND GUN.



THE MEADOW LARK (*Sturnella magna*).

THE man who does not know this beautiful bird has never tasted the full joys of the fields in spring. The lark, with his yellow breast, black crescent and gamy-looking back, is one of the most pleasing features of the great out-doors during the mating season. While mainly of a terrestrial habit, he frequently alights upon the topmost twig of a tree, whence he delivers a thin, wiry note, or a characteristic twitter like a wee snare-drum, as he takes wing. This call may be repeated while the bird is a-wing.

But his vocal abilities amount to more than this, and he has a son—a sweet, rather high-pitched fluting—which he very frequently sings as he walks amid the young growing grass. "Nigger-can't-see-me!" are the words an old darky once told me the lark said, and they fit the musical utterance fairly well.

The lark has a habit of lying close in the grass, like a quail, and quite often flushing only a few yards from one's foot. Its flight is rather rapid, a hurried buzzing of the wings, alternating with a period of sailing. Upon either side of the tail are white feathers, and these, sharply contrasting with the general brown tone of the upper parts, are very noticeable when the bird is in the air.

The meadow lark arrives early in the spring, and during mild winters may remain North the year round. The nest is built upon the ground, usually in a tuft of rank grass. It is roofed with bent grass, and it sometimes has a tunnel-like entrance of bent interwoven grass-blades. The eggs, from four to six in number, are white speckled with reddish brown. There is a variety of the meadow lark found on the great plains of the West, which as a musician greatly excels its relatives of the East, its song being remarkably sweet and appealing.

The meadow lark is about the size of a quail, although lighter in weight. It winters from Massachusetts and Illinois southward. Far too many gunners treat this bird as a game-bird and shoot it upon every opportunity. Its close flush and whirring flight may somewhat resemble the noisy rush of the quail, but the resemblance is very faint, as the headlong

speed is lacking, and a duffer with a gun might kill five larks straight when he could not bag two quail for five shells.

The plea that the flavor of the lark warrants his destruction will not hold water, for, to be candid, the bird upon the board is unpalatable. Far wiser and better would it be to leave him unharmed upon his dearly-loved meadows, where he performs valuable service by destroying a host of grasshoppers and other trouble-some insects. No true sportsman should shoot a lark; his buzzing flight is too easy, while his song and his services fairly entitle him to protection. My drawing will give a fair idea of the bird as he appears when perched upon a lofty limb and ready to take flight.

THE ARTIFICIAL PROPAGATION OF GAME.

The recent attempt to induce the Government to undertake the artificial propagation of various varieties of game, as has been done successfully in the case of game and purely food fishes, may prove worthy of serious consideration. So far as certain species are concerned, the idea embraces no insurmountable obstacles. The idea of fish hatcheries was at first laughed at, yet to-day we know better.

Under proper, scientific management, the modern fish hatchery does most profitable work, and millions of young fish of the most desirable sorts are annually sent to waters which require re-stocking. In the case of trout, for instance, were it not for the hatcheries and the "planting" of the fry, few rods would now arch over streams in which wild trout were once plentiful.

In England, as most sportsmen know, the supply of pheasants has for long ceased to depend upon the natural increase of wild birds. Pheasant rearing by artificial means has proved to be the only way by which to fully stock the covers.

In this country we have a greater variety of game beasts and birds to select from, and here, if anywhere, artificial propagation, if properly managed, should prove a success. The deer and elk may be bred as easily as cattle, under reasonable confinement, and experience might point the way to the more difficult problem of the moose and the caribou.

Among the feathered game, that best of birds, the quail, should be most easily managed with profit. The question of the pheasant has already been solved, as the bird has now made a home in perhaps more than half of the States in the Union. Certain species of ducks, too, might be artificially cultivated to advantage, while other varieties of upland and marsh game might be experimented with as the process developed. If the Government should take hold of this problem of game propagation and handle it as successfully as it has handled the fish, every good sportsman should rise up and call the Government blessed; and if, at the same time, or in advance, an efficient check could be put upon the game-hog and the fish-bog of to-day, the blessing would be doubled.

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