

WESTERN MEADOWLARK

Sturnella neglecta

naturalized (non-native) resident, long established

monotypic

Western Meadowlarks breed throughout w. Canada, the U.S., and n. Mexico and withdraw southward in winter to the se. U.S. and c. Mexico (Lanyon 1994, AOU 1998). Some meadowlarks were taken to New Zealand in the 1860s but only in the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* have populations been successfully introduced around the world (Long 1981, Lever 1987). Although widely reported to have been introduced to Hawaii in 1931 (e.g., Caum 1933, Munro 1944, HAS 1959-2005), Thrum (1928) mentions importation sometime in or before 1928, and a letter from Caum dated Feb 1930 also mentions this species' importation to Kaua'i (Swedberg 1967a). It is now established on this island, with introductions to other islands unsuccessful, probably due to the presence of mongooses on all islands except Kaua'i (Pedley 1949).

On *Kaua'i*, the [Hui Manu](#) (or a precursor to it) was apparently responsible for the introduction of Western Meadowlarks, probably in 1928 (Thrum 1928), when an unknown number of individuals was released at Kilohana Estates near Puhī. In Nov 1931 HBAF, in efforts to control insect pests, released an additional 14 birds on Kaua'i (*HFA* 28:127, 30:80) and another 14 were liberated there in 1933 (Swedberg 1967a), in each case at unknown localities. By the early 1940s they were well established near Puhī (Munro 1944; *E* 2:52), by 1945 they had spread to the Knudsen Gap about 7 km E of Puhī and were increasing (*E* 6:10), and in 1946 two were seen on a phone wire in Lihue (*E* 7:32). For the next 15 years reports were sparse, but by 1960 they had been observed N to at least Kilauea Pt (*E* 18:44, 23:63), and were generally reported as occurring in pasture lands throughout the island (Richardson and Bowles 1964; *E* 19:5, 80). By the 1960s they had reached Kalaheo and Kekaha (*E* 27:75, 27:103, 28:82, 29:92) and by the 1970-1980s observations were made throughout the island, from Koke'e SP and Barking Sands around to Hanalei and Ha'ena. By the 1990s, however, reports from the W side of the island declined, the last report being of a single individual at Barking Sands 3 Nov 1998. Abundance also declined through the 1980-2000s in the nw. part of the island, dropping from a high count on the Kapa'a [Christmas Bird Count](#) of 132 in 1975 to only 5 in 2007 ([Graph](#)). It is possible that this population may become extirpated on Kaua'i, as did the [Red-billed Leiothrix](#) some 60 years after introduction.

Western Meadowlarks were also released by HBAF and others on Ni'ihau in 1934, O'ahu in 1931 (6 individuals) and 1933 (8), Moloka'i in 1931 and 1933 (14 each year), Maui about 1934, and eight each on Hawai'i I in 1931 and 1933 (Caum 1933, Swedberg 1967a, Munro 1944, Fisher 1951; *HFA* 28:127, 30:80). Except for an observation by Munro of one at Waikolu Gulch, Moloka'i, in 1936, no further observations of these released birds were recorded. Reports from the Parker Ranch, Hawai'i, in 1974 (Brennan 1974) and of a possible sighting at the Honolulu Airport in Oct 1983 are unsubstantiated. Likewise, the casual report of "a meadowlark" on Midway in Nov-Dec 1971 (Hofslund 1972), although intriguing, cannot be verified.

Two very weakly distinguished subspecies of Western Meadowlark have been recognized, nominate *S.n. neglecta* breeding in the e. and s. portion of the range and *confluenta* of coastal British Columbia to s. California (P. Pyle 1997b). Importations of this species to Hawaii were from San Francisco (Swedberg 1967a), within the breeding

range of *confluente*, but these birds may have been imported to San Francisco from elsewhere. Examination of one specimen collected at an unknown locality on Kaua'i (BPBM 178487; [HRBP](#) 5939-5941) indicates that it may be closer to *confluente* (PP examination) but this determination is not verified and, in any case, we prefer to consider the species monotypic (*cf.* Lanyon 1994). USNM also has a specimen (556286, collected 1980) that was prepared as a skeleton.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

Citation: Pyle, R.L., and P. Pyle. 2009. The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status. B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI, U.S.A. Version 1 (31 December 2009) <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>