

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Edouard TRAVIES (Doullens 1809 - Paris 1876)

An Eastern or Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna* or *Sturnella neglecta*), a Common or European Starling (*Sturnus Vulgaris*) and an Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*)

Watercolour, pen and brown ink and wash, with framing lines in pencil.

Signed Edouard Travies [partially cut off] in the lower margin.

170 x 100 cm. (6 3/4 x 4 in.)

Distinguishable by the distinctive black 'V' on its chest, the eastern meadowlark is a medium-sized bird that can be found throughout the eastern portion of North and South America. Their habitat includes open fields, pastures, prairies and meadows. Based on its plumage, the bird depicted at the top of this sheet appears to be a breeding adult. The eastern meadowlark shares similar characteristics, including colouring and size, with the western meadowlark, native to western North America. Given the striking similarity of the two species, Traviès could have been studying either type when executing this drawing.

The common starling, also known as the European starling, was originally native to Eurasia, but today has a vast range that extends across the globe. A medium-sized bird, they inhabit a wide variety of open areas, including city centres, woodlands and reedbeds. The plumage of the common starling varies based upon their breeding season, during which it appears to be iridescent shades of black, purple and green. Outside of the breeding season during the winter months, white spots show more prominently throughout their feathers. Highly social and gregarious, common starlings are often found in flocks which can grow to be larger than one million individuals.

Previously identified as an African pied starling, the bird depicted at the bottom of the sheet appears,

based upon its plumage, to be another type of starling. Endemic to South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, the African pied starling is predominately black, except for a white lower belly and undertail. The bird depicted here could be an immature Asian pied starling, which has a similar plumage pattern, although it is not necessarily an exact match, as differences remain in colouration between the two. It remains difficult to determine precisely what bird Traviès was studying when making this drawing, as its pattern and colouring are quite unusual.

Literature:

Achille Richard, *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*, Paris, 1838.

Artist description:

Among the finest natural history draughtsmen of the 19th century in France, Edouard Traviès de Villers was a gifted watercolourist and illustrator, and exhibited at the Paris Salons between 1831 and 1866.

Best known for his ornithological watercolours, his activity in this field culminated in seventy-nine magnificent illustrations for his book *Les oiseaux les plus remarquables par leurs formes et leurs couleurs*, published in Paris and London in 1857. Traviès also illustrated other works of natural history, such as *Types du règne animal: Buffon en estampes*; a work intended for children that appeared in 1864. Traviès was further known for his paintings and watercolours of dead game, depicted hanging from a nail on a wall in a sort of trompe-l'oeil effect; indeed, he was one of the first 19th century French artists to develop this theme, which had been established in the previous century by such artists as Jean-Baptiste Oudry.

These watercolours by Edouard Traviès were once part of the exceptional collection of French ornithological watercolours of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries assembled in the 1920s and 1930s by the French industrialist and bibliophile Marcel Jeanson (1885-1942). Several of these watercolours were used to illustrate Achille Richard's *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*, published in Paris in 1834, 1838 and 1845.