

THE MONTCLAIR BIRD CLUB

YOUR WEEKLY BIRD 45

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by Rick Wright

Dickcissel



Common to irregularly abundant across its vast midwestern breeding range, the dickcissel has long been a taxonomic puzzle. Over the nearly two centuries since its discovery in New York, this handsome little bird has been variously classified as an Old World bunting, a New World sparrow, a finch, and a New World blackbird; at the moment, the dickcissel—originally known in English as the black-throated bunting—is considered a member of the Cardinalidae, its nearest New Jersey relative among that family the indigo bunting.

The clearing of the deciduous forest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries let the dickcissel expand its range from the prairies east to the Atlantic. Last century, reforestation, urbanization, and the intensification of agriculture drove the species west, and it is now scarce and local east of the Appalachians. In New Jersey, a few pairs nest most years in remnant grasslands and pastures, but most of us see this species in its southward migration in autumn. Sandy Hook, Island Beach, Alpha, Negri-Nepote, the Meadowlands, and other open habitats are good places from August to October to see this bird—or, more often, to hear its distinctive uncouth buzzing call overhead.

And every once in a while, one of those autumn birds drops in at a suburban bird feeder, as this one did at ours in Bloomfield one September day.



If you would like to see your photographs highlighted here, send one or two pictures with a short paragraph to [Sandy Sorkin & Rick Wright at MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com](mailto:SandySorkin&RickWright@MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com).



Southwest Wings

