

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? King Rail How many? 1Location? Big Marsh, Butler Co., Iowa -- on N-S dike from south parking lotType of habitat? marsh with large open areas of water with shrubs and vegetationWhen? date(s): May 21, 1983 time: 3:01 to 3:06 p.m.Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Liscumb, Iowa 50148others with you: Beth Proescholdt, Phyllis Harrisothers before or after you: none that I know about.

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

We were walking on the dike heading toward the parking lot when we noticed a rail walking 70-80' ahead of us in the path on top of the dike. We had been flushing many Virginia Rails and Soras just a short time before and realized at once this was twice as big as a Virginia Rail. We had very good looks at this cooperative bird. It had no gray eye patch like a Virginia Rail but was all brown in the face. It also had a dark bill unlike the reddish bills of Virginia Rails we had been seeing. It walked along the dike in front of us for about 5 minutes as we were getting closer. Then it ducked into the grasses on the side. We flushed it from the grasses from about 25-30' away. Then we flushed another smaller Virginia Rail just right after seeing the King Rail fly.

Similar species and how eliminated: Virginia Rail is much smaller than this rail. The King Rail was the size of a small hen. The King Rail had brownish cheeks and a dark bill unlike the Virginia Rail's grayish cheeks and reddish bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:
 Cloudy, overcast. 70-80' estimated and 25-30' paced off when flushed.
 7x35 Binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: this is a life list species.

References and persons consulted before writing description:
 Robbins - Birds of North America; R.T. Peterson's Field guide to the Birds, 4th ed.
 How long before field notes made? immediately this form completed? May 30, 1983

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