

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

Species: Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) Number: I

Location: Sweet Marsh, which is located one mile East of Tripoli, Bremer County, IA.

Date: April 29, 1978 Time bird seen: 6:30 PM

Description: The size of the bird was less than that of a Sora (*Porzana carolina*). In shape the bird was in most ways similiar to a Sora also. A plump body, with a short tail. Wings were slender and rounded at tips. Legs were held loosely away from body when first flushed, then tucked close. The color of head was dark on top with some yellowish. Back was brownish-yellow, with some dark areas in a streaked pattern. The wing color was dark (from behind), with some yellow at base, and a distinct white patch at base of trailing edge of wing. Tail was dark. Legs were light, the shade of which I do not remeber. The eyes, bill, underparts and underwing color was not seen because of the angle of observation. Bill although not distinctly recalled was definetly not of any great length.

Description of behavior: The bird was flushed at close range. In the first few wingbeats its wings rubbed against some grass making a slight disturbance, which caught my attention. By the time I turned my head the bird had doubled it's distance from me. The rapid shallow wingbeats, once agin reminded me of a Sora when flushed. The bird's flight path was rather low (less than 4 feet), and flapped it's wings steadily, then made a short glide and dropped back in to cover.

Habitat: The area of Sweet Marsh where the bird was flushed had a water depth of about two feet. Many large and small clumps of grass covered mounds of earth, there was also a shallow marshy spot that was heavily vegetated. Otherwise the area surrounding sighting was similiar. This type of habitat covered several acres. The grasses were mostly remanent of last years growth, with new sprouts over a foot in height. The water was slightly stagnant, and water level was slightly higher than normal because of recent rains.

Similiar species: I can think of no species of bird of similiar size with a white patch on hind wing. Other rails would be uniform dark and larger. Perching birds such as a Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza gerogiana*) have long tails. Extreme comparisons could be made with Common Snipe (*Capella gallinago*) which is long billed, has pointed wings, and has a rapid zig-zag flying style.

Distance: When flushed the bird was very close at hand, within six feet, but by the time I got my head turned it was at an estimated 10 or more feet. It was watched in flight until it landed, an estimated distance of 90 feet.

Optical equipment: Because of close range, and rapid appearance of subject none were used.

Light: Sun was at my back as I viewed the bird, the position of the sun was in the northwest, with the bird in the east. The sky had broken clouds, with the sun shining at time of observation. Although sun was close to horizon it still had strong light. Altogether fair viewing conditions.

No previous experience with this species. I am familiar with the other rail species except King Rail (*Rallus elegans*), and Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*).

No other observers ~~see this~~ saw the bird.

Books consulted: Peterson's "A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS".

Detailed notes were taken an hour after sighting, then typed into their current form using notes.

Date April 30, 1978

Signature: *Joe Schaufenbuel*
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