

Black Rail
11 May 1987
near Dixon, Scott Co., IA
*Peter C. Petersen
IBL 57:82, 58:74

Record Number: 87-10
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Peter C. Petersen

REFERENCE

Field Reports: IBL 57:82

Records Committee: IBL 58:75

VOTE: 1-III, 4-IV, 1-V, 1-abstain

IV. Probably correct, but not convincingly documented. No description that supports this even to be a rail, although I'm sure this observer knows what a rail looks like. Why wasn't it a fledgling of some other species. At 8:40 PM in early May, certainly the light is beginning to fade. In addition, any documentation based on notes taken 10 hours after observation (6:40 AM the next morning) is always less than convincing.

IV. Enticing. Could this be a fledgling passerine of some type? Although Black Rail occurs away from water, it would be more suggestive if water were present.

V. Due to time of day and lack of description to adequately describe this extremely secretive rail, I cannot vote higher than this. This very well could have been a Black Rail, but an entirely dark, weak flying species, sparrow sized bird does not clinch it for me.

IV. A very small rail seen at dusk in the air does not necessarily have to be a black rail. Perhaps the size was deceptive in that light or perhaps it was a very early young rail as a brood of Virginias was reported in May.

IV. I'm ambivalent about this record. On the one hand, identifying a Black Rail (of all things) while driving at twilight is difficult, to say the least. Normally I would reject this record immediately. On the other hand if anyone could be trusted to identify this correctly it would be Pete. So should I vote IV or III?

III. Date, location, circumstances, observed features all point to correct ID.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

87-10

What species? Black Rail How many? 1

Location? 1/4 mi. S. High Rock Bridge near Dixon, Scott Co.

Type of Habitat? grassy ditch along county road

When? date(s): 11 May, 1987 time: 8:40 P.M. to 8:41 P.M.

Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd. Davis IA.

Others with you: Don Moeller + Walter Zuurdeeg were in car but did not see bird. ⁵²⁸⁰³

Others before or after you: _____

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

While driving in twilight I saw a very small, sparrow-sized rail fly from the left ditch as I made a left turn cutting corner near left side of road. The bird flew over the fence and over an unplowed corn stubble field away from the car. The legs dangled down + the flight was very weak. It was entirely dark - wings, back, head + tail. I stopped, backed up + ran into the field but the bird had apparently flown over a hill out of my sight.

Similar species; how eliminated: Yellow Rail - no white wing patch.

Sora + Virginia Rail - bird much too small, flight weaker than either. ~~we~~ had seen Soras several times in the preceding two days.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? —

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment. Seen without optical equipment in flight at 15' to 150' flying away.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen this species previously in Wisconsin in ^{full} daylight in flight.

References and persons consulted before writing description: none

How long before field notes made? 10 hrs this form completed? 1 day

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).