

Black Rail

SU 1959

Broken Kettle Creek, Plymouth Co., IA

Eldon J. Bryant

Bryant 1962

Record Number: 81-FQ
Classification: A-D

REFERENCE

Bryant, E.J. 1962. Black Rail in western Plymouth County. IBL 32:87.

VOTE (1981): 5-III, 1-III.5, I-IV

IV, not enough detail.

III, Details lacking, but observed in hand by a competent observer. Can Eldon supply more details?

III, Actions typical, imm. rail would not have white stripes (or fly).

III.5, A summer single observer record. Bird in field during mowing. 'Black plumage with fine white lines' and 'small size' -- only description. Observer says he sees these little rails 'occasionally.' This 1959 report appeared in 1962 IBL.

III, Bird was examined in hand, description not good but satisfactory.

Bryant, E. J. 1962. Black Rail in western Plymouth County. IBL 32:87.

Black Rail in Western Plymouth County. On Oct. 5, 1962, while picking corn in a field near the Broken Kettle Creek, a Black Rail was flushed in front of the picker. This bird flew ahead of me for perhaps one hundred feet and settled into the unpicked corn. I was unable to relocate this most elusive of birds of this area. 13

The Black Rail is not on the I.O.U. Field Check List but I do see one occasionally when working the fields. The best chance I have had to observe one was the summer of 1959 when I was mowing alfalfa in another field adjoining the same creek. As the unmowed strip narrowed, I noticed a bird much like a very small black chicken would flutter ahead of the cutter bar each time I came around and escape into uncut hay. The last time around the bird fluttered up once and settled back to the ground and was apparently run over by the cutter bar of the mower. I spotted the little bird in the hay and got off to examine it. I examined the stunned creature carefully, noting the characteristics and especially the black plumage decorated with fine white lines. I had to check with Peterson's **Field Guide** to know for sure this was indeed the Black Rail. This particular rail soon recovered from his experience and was able to fly a few hundred feet to the creek where it disappeared. 11

I see these strange little rails occasionally while farming along the creek. They flush, fly in a fluttery manner for a short distance, and then drop to the ground and out of sight. I am not able to say for sure if the Black Rails I see are resident or migratory. I suspect the one in the alfalfa field was nesting there but can furnish no proof whatsoever.

I shall try to gain more knowledge, if possible, and feel that as a farmer with several fields bordering creeks, I may have better opportunity to do so than most other nature lovers. ELDON J. BRYANT, Route 1, Akron.