

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 08/26/93

Black Rail

< 1907

Keokuk, Lee Co., IA

Praeger

Anderson 1907

Record Number: 81-FM  
Classification: NA

REFERENCE

Anderson 1907

DuMont 1933

VOTE (1981): 1-III, I-IV, 4-V, 1-VI

VI, no data.

V, no data.

IV, no data.

V, absolutely no details; sounds like a supposition to me.

Subgenus CRECISCUS Cabanis.

84. (216). *Porzana jamaicensis* (Gmel.). Black Rail.

The Black Rail appears to be even rarer than the preceding species, its range not extending so far to the north. Its habits are similar.

County records: Blackhawk—"rare migrant; one specimen mounted" (Walters). Des Moines—"Burlington, Iowa, 1892—specimen in the flesh examined by me" (Nutting, Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci., 1892, 41). Lee—"very rare—Keokuk district" (Praeger). Linn—"a set of eggs was found by myself in 1899, too far incubated to save" (Berry). Van Buren—"some 17 or 18 years ago a farmer caught one with his hands while plowing in a swamp and brought it to me. This is the only time that I have known it to occur here—Hillsboro" (W. J. Savage). Webster—"rare; July 11, 1899, killed a small rail of some sort new to me, along the edge of the slough in Black's field just east of the rendering works (Fort Dodge). It is 5½ inches in length; dark slate on head and breast, back dark brown tinging to a reddish at back of neck" (Somes).

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*Creciscus jamaicensis stoddardi* Coale. Black Rail

Very rare. Anderson (1907) recorded several occurrences of this species in Iowa as follows: "County records: Blackhawk—"rare migrant; one specimen mounted" (Walters). Des Moines—"Burlington, Iowa, 1892—specimen in flesh examined by me" (Nutting, Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci., 1892, 41). Lee—"very rare—Keokuk district" (Praeger). Linn—"a set of eggs was found by myself in 1899, too far incubated to save" (Berry). Van Buren—"some 17 or 18 years ago a farmer caught one with his hands while plowing in a swamp and brought it to me. This is the only time I have known it to occur here—Hillsboro" (W. G. Savage). Webster—"rare; July 11, 1899, killed a small rail of some sort new to me, along the edge of the slough in Black's field just east of the rendering works (Fort Dodge). It is 5½ inches in length; dark slate on head and breast, back dark brown tinging to a reddish at back of neck" (Somes)." The specimen mounted by Walters has been examined by the writer and found to be an adult Yellow Rail. There is no evidence that the specimen examined by Nutting was preserved. Widmann (1907) recorded that one was seen at Iowa City, Johnson County, October 11, 1885.

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There are but two recent observations, both by E. D. Nauman of Sigourney. He records (Wilson Bull., XXXIV, pp. 217-19) one seen May 5, 1914 as it flew from the marsh grass within four or five feet of him. Nauman said in a letter that this bird was distinctly a rail, black, and too small for any other species. At that time of year it could hardly have been the young of any other species of rail. Another was seen by him at Sigourney, October 1, 1925. The writer has been unable to find an Iowa specimen.

The only basis for considering the Black Rail as a breeding bird in Iowa is the statement by George H. Berry that he took a set of eggs in Linn County in 1899. Some question has arisen recently in regard to the veracity of several of Berry's records. Therefore it seems advisable, as the eggs were neither preserved nor examined by a trained ornithologist, to remove this species from the list of Iowa breeding birds.