

Black Rail
8 Oct 1989
Dickinson Co., IA
Hansen
IBL 60:11, 13, 61:85, Hansen 1991

Record Number: 89-29
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

James L. Hansen

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:11, 13

Records Committee: IBL 61:85

Hansen, J. L. 1991. Black Rail in Dickinson County. IBL
61:26-27.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: Size, behavior, color (black with chestnut patch on back) are conclusive.

A-D: Adequate description of this difficult-to-glimpse species. Habitat was correct, but I have no migration info. to judge appropriateness of date. Other Rallidae species have downy young that are black, but according to Chapman (1983), nesting dates are generally in May. Chestnut on back should preclude these anyway.

A-D: Good documentation. The habits are rail like / the color only fits Black Rail.

A-D: A great sighting! The rusty or chestnut-patch on its back should exclude any thought of other rail chicks which are black and could be of this size.

A-D: An excellent description - reddish patches seen. A careful documentation and conclusion by observer. Who knows how far north these birds are in summer or how much further they go after breeding?

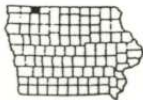
The most striking change in fall birding in Iowa over the last 10 years has been the increase in gulls and number of unusual gulls that have been picked out of the large concentrations. The increased coverage of water areas has also documented the regular occurrence of all three scoters.

211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA 52246
16 Longview Knoll, RR 6, Iowa City, IA 52240
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BLACK RAIL IN DICKINSON COUNTY

JAMES L. HANSEN

On 8 October 1989, my 14-year-old son, Jeffrey, and I were duck hunting on a restored wetland on the 142-acre McBreen Marsh Wildlife Management Area in Dickinson County, about 4 miles northwest of the city of Spirit Lake. The wetland we were on, in the north-central part of the area, had 10-20 yards of mudflats around the edge due to the summer's drought, and three round clumps of river bulrush at the south end.



After a few hours of duck hunting and bird watching, we began walking around the edge of the marsh to try to flush a Common Snipe. As we returned to the south end, at 11:15 a.m., I saw a small, dark bird standing on a mudflat about 3 feet from a river bulrush clump. It was black and about 4 or 5 inches tall, and it ran into the clump when I was about 40 yards from it. I suspected right away that it was a Black Rail, even though I had never seen one before. I walked into the clump and saw the bird again at a distance of about 25 feet as it ran about 10 feet from one clump to another. I again walked into a clump and saw it a third time at about the same distance as it ran to another clump. My son saw the bird the last two times, but not the first time.

The last two times I distinctly saw a 4- or 5-inch long black bird with a short neck, long legs, and a rusty or chestnut patch on its back. Because it moved quickly, I was unable to note details of the bill, eye, or other coloration. Before I told my son anything about what I had noted, I asked him what he saw, and he said it was black with rust-color on it. It did not vocalize, and the bird never flew. All sightings were with the unaided eye, and the last two were with the sun behind us.

The status of the Black Rail in Iowa is not well known. There are only a few accepted records of the species in Iowa (see Dinsmore, Kent, Koenig, Petersen, and Roosa, 1984, *Iowa Birds*, Iowa State Univ. Press, pp. 121-122) with the most recent one in May 1989 in Cerro Gordo County. Among the records are one on 5 October 1962 in Plymouth County and another on 1 October 1925 at Sigourney. Thus this bird is the latest fall date for the species in Iowa. On that late date it seems likely the bird was migrating through from some unknown area.

McBreen Marsh Wildlife Management Area, with its 40 acres of restored wetlands on 142 acres, was made possible by the joint effort of Ducks Unlimited and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. This area was the first Ducks Unlimited Major Donor Project in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Five private donors each contributed \$10,000 to purchase the area, with other DU funds paying the remaining \$5,000. Iowa DNR personnel then carried out the wetland restoration work and other management.

Since 1987 the various cooperating agencies and individuals in Iowa have restored at least 716 wetlands totalling more than 3,100 acres as part of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. These restored wetlands should be of interest to birders, and the restoration program deserves their support, because the wetlands provide habitat to a variety of species of wildlife.

2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings, Montana 59105

I.O.U. BUSINESS

FALL BUSINESS MEETING

Council Bluffs, 25 August 1990, 3:00-4:10 p.m.

HILDA SICKELS, SECRETARY

Presiding: Jim Dinsmore, President

Minutes of the spring 1990 meeting were accepted as printed (Rick Hollis, seconded by Bud Gode).

Reports

Treasurer: Copies of the report were distributed. Livermore reported that a \$25,000 C.D. had matured.

Two new C.D.'s were purchased, one for \$3,000 and the other for \$20,000. The other \$2,000 was transferred to the checking account. Membership renewals will be mailed in October; dues have been raised to \$15 for regular membership.

Publications Committee: The committee will meet today.

Records Committee: Bendorf reported that the committee is actively reviewing 1989 and 1990 records.

Membership Committee: Sinclair reported that the membership stood at 530. A new membership brochure is being prepared.

Nominating Committee: A committee consisting of Beth Proescholdt (chair), Francis Moore, and Bob Myers has been appointed to nominate candidates for President, Vice President, and three board positions for the spring 1991 elections.

Breeding Bird Atlas Committee: Carol Thompson reported that field work on the project is nearly complete. She thanked members who had participated and appealed to all to turn in their atlas cards.

Big Day Committee: They will present their report at the dinner.

Education Committee: They are still working on the booklet and will be meeting today.

Old Business

A total of 64 I.O.U. members attended the Tri-state meeting in LaCrosse. Excess monies from that meeting were distributed proportionately to the three states; the I.O.U. received \$291.60 which will be put in the meeting fund.

New Business

The spring 1991 meeting will be held in Waterloo on 17-19 May. Francis Moore is in charge of arrangements.

There is interest in having the fall 1991 meeting in Indianola. Ann Johnson and Jim Sinclair are preparing a bid for the meeting. There is interest in having the spring 1992 meeting in the Cedar Rapids area.

A fall field trip at Saylorville is being planned. More details will appear in the newsletter. A planned trip to Union Slough was cancelled due to heavy rains.

A formal note of thanks was expressed to Tom Kent for his excellent work as editor of *Iowa Bird Life* the past four years. A document of thanks for members to sign was circulated.

Bob Cecil and Barb Wilson were thanked for their work in making arrangements for this meeting and to all others who helped out in other ways.

Announcements

Dinsmore noted that former President and longtime I.O.U. member Judge Charles Ayres died earlier this summer. Charter I.O.U. member Fred Pierce still resides in Winthrop and enjoys visits from birders. Other announcements included concern about the Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest (Diane Porter), National Birdline Hotline Cooperative (Jim Hansen), and upcoming meetings in

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? black railHow many? oneLocation? South end of a restored wetland on the north side of the McBreen Marsh Wildlife Area, 4 mi. NW of Spirit Lake, Dickinson Co.Type of habitat? Was in 3 20-30' diam. clumps of river bulrush surrounded by mudflatsWhen? date(s): October 8, 1989 time: 11:15 to 11:30 a.m.Who? your name and address: James L. Hansen, 103 S. 17th St., Clear Lake, Iowa 50428others with you: Jeffrey K. Hansen ^(age 14) (same address)others before or after you: none

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.

I first saw the bird standing on a mudflat about 3 feet from a river bulrush clump. It was black and about 4 or 5 inches tall, and it ran into the clump when I was about 40 yards from it. I walked into the clump and saw the bird again at a distance of about 25 feet as it ran about 10 feet from one clump to another. I again walked into a clump and saw it a third time at about the same distance as it ran to another clump. Jeffrey Hansen saw the bird the last 2 times, but not the first time. The second 2 times I distinctly saw a 4- or 5-inch long black bird with a short neck, long legs, and a rusty or chestnut-patch on its back. I asked Jeff what he saw (before I described what I saw), and he said it was black with rust-color on it. There was no vocalization, and the bird never flew. I tried for a few minutes to sight the bird again, but was not able to flush it. Because it moved quickly, I was unable to note details of other coloration, bill, or eye.

Similar species and how eliminated:

sora and Virginia rail - Was smaller and different color (black) than these. yellow rail - wrong color, also

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

sunny, sun behind us for last two sightings;
unaided eyes - no binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I'm very familiar with the other rails, but I had never seen a black rail before.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Robbins, et al. - Birds of North America

How long before field notes made? 2 hours this form completed? 2 days

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240