

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

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Virginia Rail

1 Jan 1998

Brown's Lake, Woodbury Co., IA

*S. Dinsmore

IBL 68:60

Record Number: 98-02

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 612 1/2 West Magnolia St., Fort Collins,
CO 80521 [*6/13/98]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:60

Records Committee: IBL 69:89

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Excellent description of typical behavior of wintering VA
Rails.

98-02

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Virginia Rail

Number: 1

Location: Brown's L., Woodbury Co., IA

Habitat: marsh with open water

Date: 1 January 1998

Time: 8:15-8:23 a.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 612 ½ West Magnolia St. Fort Collins, CO 80521

Others who saw bird(s): none

Description of bird(s): On 1 January, I stopped at the warm water outflow at the southwest end of Brown's Lake in the hopes that I would find something unusual like a rail. With that in mind, I played a loop tape with a Virginia Rail call. Based on my experiences with wintering Virginia Rails in western Nebraska, I thought this location seemed ideal for one to overwinter in Iowa. I first played the tape on the west side of the canal and got no response. I then moved to the east side where the marsh was more extensive. The tape had cycled three or four times when I heard a Virginia Rail "grunting" nearby. Within a couple of minutes, the bird appeared at the edge of an opening in the marsh. It did not vocalize again. This behavior is typical of wintering rails in Nebraska.

I studied the bird for several minutes before it disappeared back into the marsh. There were no other birds nearby for size comparisons. I noted the typical rail shape including long legs, plump body, short wings, fairly long neck, and long, slightly decurved bill. The bill was reddish at the base with a darker tip. The cheek was light gray and the throat was white. The underparts were mostly buff-colored except that the flanks were black with fine white barring. The legs appeared dull orange, but were hard to see well because of lighting. A small rufous patch was visible on the folded wing. The upperparts were brown. The tail was very short, and the bird flicked it several times when it walked.

Similar species and how eliminated: The bird was much too small to be a King Rail. Bill shape and pattern on the underparts eliminated Sora, the only other likely species.

Previous experience with species: I have extensive experience with Virginia Rail and other rail species.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with clear skies and the sun behind me. Estimated viewing distance was less than 5m. I used 10x42 binoculars.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes written? none written

How long before this form completed? written on 6 January 1998