

Rock Wren
17 Sep 1991
Red Oak, Montgomery Co., IA
*Carlisle
IBL 62:17, 71, Carlisle 1992

2

Record Number: 91-39
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Dave Carlisle, 2000 Sunnyslope, Red Oak, IA 51566

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:17

Records Committee: 62:71

Carlisle, D. 1992. Rock Wren in Montgomery County. IBL
62:85-86

VOTE: 6 A-D, 1 no vote recorded

A-D, I believe the document to be sufficient. A possibility exists that it could be a house wren, but the buffy outer tail feathers should eliminate that. As for the other bird being a rock wren I would not hazard a guess.

A-D, Excellent description. What an interesting experience!

A-D, Except for the part about the garage, this bird was in acceptable habitat, and in a part of the state where extralimital birds might be expected to occur. This would have been an excellent opportunity to obtain photographs of this species.

A-D, The lack of eye-stripe and back stripes, rusty color, buffy tail corners, and breast streaks convince me that this inexperienced observer accurately identified this bird-in-hand from a book.

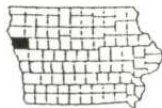
A-D, This is the only wren species with buffy tail corners, finely streaked breast and rusty rump. After looking through numerous reference materials (and not finding much on juvenile wren plumages) these appear diagnostic for this species, even though no description was given for the coloration of the rest of the plumage or of the shape and characteristics of the head and rest of the body. I reluctantly vote A-D until and unless someone can prove otherwise.

A-D, The descriptions provided eliminate the other wrens from consideration and identify this as a Rock Wren.

BLACK-NECKED STILT IN WOODBURY COUNTY

BILL HUSER

Snyder's Bend, an oxbow lake of the Missouri River, had low water levels during the early spring of 1991. This left a band 5-8 meters wide of exposed sand and mudflats around much of the lake's perimeter. This seemed to be ideal foraging habitat for waders and shorebirds, the latter in most years discouraged by the steeper shorelines or cattails extending into rather deep water (0.5 m).



On 6 April 1991, my son Richard and I found that waterfowl, large waders, and pelicans were quite numerous there. While viewing shallow water areas near cattails for puddle ducks, I suddenly found a Black-necked Stilt in the field of my 32 power spotting scope. The identification was obvious, immediate, and astonishing. Similar species--if there really are any--were quickly eliminated. No avocet, oystercatcher, or phalarope combined the characteristics so evident in this starkly plumaged bird.

With the bird approximately 180 meters away in excellent, direct, frontal lighting, the following description was recorded: A large, long-legged black and white shorebird foraged in very shallow water and mudflats that were covered with mats of algae killed by the winter temperatures. The bird picked at these surfaces with quick motions, covering a good deal of territory with rapid, long-legged strides. The dorsal side was jet black and contrasted starkly with the bright white underparts. Exceptions to this pattern included a white spot over the eye and white at the bill base which contrasted with the black upper face. The legs were very long and bright pink; the bill long, straight, and black. In flight, the bird showed a black back and upper wings, offset by a white tail. The undersides of the wings were black, as well. Its size, gauged against the nearby Lesser Yellowlegs, was large, with linear dimensions, but not bulk, nearly equal to those of nearby Green-winged Teal.

Over the next eight days, I viewed the stilt on five more occasions, each time confirming the identifying characters. I was surprised to find that the bird used its long legs for striding and not for wading in the deeper waters inaccessible to other shorebirds. During this time several local birders and others from across the state viewed this bird. I took photos which did not approach my expectations and are barely diagnostic. I visited the area again on 19 April and could not locate the stilt. The reason for its disappearance was obvious; water levels had risen about one foot due to rising river levels and local rain. The numerous shorebirds of several species that had been present for several weeks were also absent.

Though a former channel of the Missouri River that determined the Iowa-Nebraska boundary passes through the lake, the portion of the lake frequented by the stilt is entirely within Iowa. The Nebraska portion of the lake lies a mere 200-300 meters to the west (Mark Haindfield pers. comm.). (Note the state boundary does not coincide with either the present river channel or the present lake bed.)

Black-necked Stilts are known to Iowa by 12 references prior to 1984. Each of those references, including two specimens, however, lacked details or adequate labels. Of six specific sightings, three are from the state's western tier of counties in the early 1900s (Dinsmore et al. 1984). But on 1-2 June 1984, a pair was located, documented, and photographed at Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge and accepted as Iowa's first official record (Dinsmore 1984).

The nearest known nesting site is in western Nebraska where breeding stilts were discovered in Garden County in 1985 (Helsing 1985). Having apparently bred in the vicinity each year since, the 1991 population included at least six adults with a

minimum of two nests, both failures due to predation and flooding (Mary Clausen pers. comm.).

Stilts have been recorded throughout South Dakota on the merits of seven reports since 1949. None of these reports mention breeding. Though the reports include May (2), June (1), July (2), August (1), and September (1) dates, none mentions more than one individual being present (South Dakota Ornithologists' Union 1991).

Eckert (1983) mentions one unacceptable Minnesota record, though South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin have valid records. Janssen (1987) lists no Minnesota stilt records.

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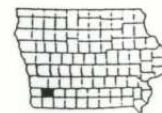
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ROCK WRENS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

DAVID CARLISLE

On 17 September 1991, I was leaving my house in Red Oak about 7:50 a.m. when I noticed two birds inside my garage. Apparently the birds had entered the evening before when I had left the garage door open, or they came in through a small 1.5 x 2 inch opening in the weather stripping along the bottom of



the garage door, the latter of which seems more likely. I had entered through the side door with the garage door still closed when I saw one of the birds attempting to exit through a closed window while the other was perched on the garage door tracks. I immediately identified both birds as wrens; however, they were larger than the common House Wren and lacked the light eye ring of that species. Fearing that the one bird which kept flying into the window was going to injure itself, I opened the garage door to allow them outside. One of the birds flew immediately out the opened door while the other kept flying into the window. I then grabbed my fishing net and snagged the other bird without any trouble.

With the bird in my possession, I immediately noticed the somewhat longer, buffy/light colored tail corners. Thoroughly confused, I took the bird to my pickup where I could use my Peterson field guide to aid me in identifying it. While referring to the field guide, I noticed that the bird lacked the definite eye stripe characteristic of the Bewick's, Carolina, and Marsh wrens. There were not white stripes on the back as

in the Marsh Wren, and it did not have the white outer tail feathers characteristic of Bewick's Wren.

Upon further observation, I looked for characteristics of the Rock Wren described by Peterson (1980). Having already noticed the buffy tail corners, I next noticed the presence of a finely streaked breast and the rusty rump, all characteristics of the Rock Wren. Furthermore, there are quite a few rocky outcrops along the small tributaries and rivers in the surrounding area; and there is a limestone quarry about 4 miles north of Red Oak which could provide adequate habitat for these birds.

According to Peterson (1980) (the only reference I had at the time I had possession of the bird), this species is accidental east of the Mississippi River; thus I assumed that this species was common in Iowa. That is where I made a very big mistake. Believing that I had stressed the bird enough (I had had it in my possession for about 10 minutes), I released it on the ground outside my garage without taking a picture (my second mistake). Fifteen minutes later, upon arriving at work, I checked the status of the Rock Wren in Iowa (Dinsmore et al. 1984). It was at this point I realized the rare occurrence of this bird in Iowa. I then went back to my house and, of course, could not find the bird anywhere. Through a couple of phone calls, one to Ross Silcock in Sidney and the other to a former teacher Dr. David Easterla at Northwest Missouri State University, I learned that there have only been a couple of documented sightings of this species in Iowa; however, this species was sighted and documented by Easterla in the Maryville, Missouri area, 60 miles south of Red Oak, in fall 1990.

LITERATURE CITED

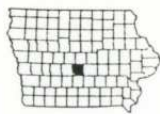
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2000 *Sunnyslope, Red Oak, IA 51566*

A SECOND RED PHALAROPE AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

At 10:38 a.m. on 4 August 1991, while birding the Saylorville Reservoir dam in Polk County, I saw a Red Phalarope in basic plumage. Throughout the observation, the bird swam a few feet off the rocky dam face, gradually working to the east. The stocky body, thin neck, small head, and swimming behavior easily identified the bird as a phalarope. Though there were no other birds for direct comparison, I estimated that the bird was about the size of a Pectoral Sandpiper. The bill was roughly equal to the length of the head and was bicolored; dark near the tip, gradually fading to a small, pale area at the base of the bill. There was a dark spot around each eye that extended forward to the base of the bill. The forehead, cap, and nape were also dark. The broad white supercilium was also seen. The throat, sides of the neck, breast, and flanks were white and marked with irregular buffy patches. The undertail coverts were also white. The mantle was mostly pale gray except for several small, scattered black spots. The wings were darker than the



mantle with the primaries appearing black. The tail also looked black on the swimming bird. I was not able to observe the bird in flight. Separation from Red-necked Phalarope was based largely on bill shape and the unstreaked mantle. I concluded, on the basis of the pale gray mantle and bicolored bill, that the bird was an adult Red Phalarope that had nearly completed the molt to basic plumage.

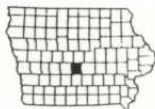
I last observed the bird at 11:14 a.m. just before other birders arrived. The bird was not relocated, despite a thorough search of the reservoir that afternoon. This is the second acceptable record of Red Phalarope in Iowa. The first was of a juvenile bird at Saylorville Reservoir on 30 September-3 October 1988 (Dinsmore, S. J., and B. Engebretsen. *Iowa Bird Life* 59:19. 1989).

2600 *Glen Burnie, Raleigh, NC 27607*

TWO MORE RED PHALAROPES AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

MARK PROESCHOLDT

On 25 September 1991, I went to the Sandpiper Beach area of Saylorville Reservoir to see what birds might be there. After scoping over the gulls, terns, and shorebirds on this sunny, windy day, I noticed a very whitish shorebird floating in a corner of a small bay at the east end of the beach. As I slowly moved to get closer to this bird, I could tell it was a phalarope since it had a dark bar through and behind its eye.



The following description is compiled from my notes and notes of other observers. The phalarope had a rather thick, short, black bill which was different from the longer and more needle-like bills of both the Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes. This bird had a light grayish back that was generally unmarked and had black showing at the wing edges along the flanks. It had a dark cap on its crown and a white forehead. The breast, belly, flanks, and undersides were very white. The sides of the neck were white with a rusty wash under its chin on its throat area. Its legs were fleshy pink in color. In flight, a very distinct wing stripe, a bold white V around a gray rump, and a black-gray terminal band on its tail were observed. It had the appearance of being short-necked and short-legged and appeared about the same size as a Pectoral Sandpiper. On close observation the back, wings, and tail were a contrasting gray and black pattern with white feather edgings on the gray feathers. This bird appeared to be in mid molt going to basic plumage. It was observed occasionally spinning and probing in the water at the pool's edge and walking along the shore. It was very tame and allowed very close approach. One observer speculated that it had never seen humans before and was therefore unafraid of people approaching it. The bird was present through 30 September, and many other birders were able to see it.

This is the third sighting of a Red Phalarope in Iowa. All have been at Saylorville Reservoir and all in fall migration. The first Red Phalarope sighting in Iowa was seen from 30 September to 3 October 1988 at the north end of the Saylorville Reservoir (Dinsmore, S. J., and B. Engebretsen, *Iowa Bird Life* 59:19, 1989). Iowa's second sighting of a Red Phalarope was seen by Steve Dinsmore on 4 August 1991, at the west overlook on the Saylorville Dam.

On 26 October 1991, another Red Phalarope was seen by a group of observers at Sandpiper Beach, Saylorville Reservoir. This was a very light-colored bird with a white neck, breast, and undersides. It was blackish along the wing edges at the flanks. It had two thin black lines that went the length of the back from the nape toward the

Rock Wrens in Montgomery County, IA.

Dave Carlisle - Joint Area Naturalist

for Montgomery, Mills, Page, Fremont County Conservation Boards.

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With the bird in my possession, I immediately noticed the somewhat longer, buffy/light colored tail corners. Thoroughly confused, I took the bird to my pick-up where I could use my Peterson Field Guide to aid me in identifying it. While referring to the field guide, I took notice that the bird in hand lacked the definite eye stripe characteristic of the Bewick's, Carolina, and Marsh wrens. There were no white stripes on the back as in the Marsh Wren and it did not have the white outer tail feathers characteristic of Bewick's Wren.

Upon further observation, I looked for characteristics of the Rock Wren as described by Peterson, 1980. Having already noticed the *buffy tail corners*, I next noticed the presence of a *finely streaked breast* and the *rusty rump*; all characteristics of the Rock Wren. Furthermore, there are quite a few rocky outcrops along the small tributaries and rivers in the surrounding area; and there is limestone quarry north of Red Oak about 4 miles which could provide adequate habitat for these birds.

According to Peterson, 1980 (the only reference I had at the time I had possession of the bird), this bird is an accidental east of the Mississippi River; thus, I wasn't too concerned with this species' status. That is where I made a very big mistake. Feeling that I had stressed the bird enough (I had had it in my possession for about 10 minutes), I released it on the ground outside my garage without taking a picture of it (my second mistake). Fifteen minutes later, upon arriving to work, I thought I should check the status of the Rock Wren in Iowa according to Dinsmore, Kent, Koenig, Peterson, Roosa, 1984. It was at this point I realized the rare occurrence of this bird in Iowa. I then went back to my house and, of course, could not find the bird anywhere. Through a couple of phone calls, one to Ross Silcock in Sidney, IA and the other to a former teacher Dr. David Easterla, Professor of Biology at Northwest Missouri State University, I learned that there have only been a couple of documented sightings of this bird in Iowa; however, this species was sighted and documented by Dr. Easterla in the Maryville, Mo area, 60 miles south of Red Oak, in the Fall of 1990.

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Upon further observation, I looked for characteristics of the Rock Wren as described by Peterson, 1980. Having already noticed the buffy tail coverts, I next noticed the presence of a finely streaked breast and the very rusty, all characteristics of the Rock Wren. Furthermore, there are quite a few rocky outcrops along the small tributaries and rivers in the surrounding area, and there is limestone quarry north of Red Oak about 4 miles which could provide adequate habitat for these birds.

According to Peterson, 1980 (the only reference I had at the time I had possession of the bird), this bird is an accidental east of the Mississippi River, thus I was also concerned with this species' status. That is where I made a very big mistake. Feeling that I had stressed the bird enough (I had had it in my possession for about 10 minutes), I released it on the ground outside my garage without taking a picture of it (my second mistake). Fifteen minutes later, upon returning to work, I thought I should check the status of the Rock Wren in Iowa according to Dinsmore, Koenig, Peterson, Roosa, 1984. It was at this point I realized the rare occurrence of this bird in Iowa. I then went back to my house and of course could not find the bird anywhere. Through a couple of phone calls, one to Ross Slocum in Sidney, IA and the other to a former teacher Dr. David Eastwin, Professor of Biology at Northwest Missouri State University, I learned that there have only been a couple of documented sightings of this bird in Iowa, however, this species was sighted and documented by Dr. Eastwin in the Marysville, Mo area, 60 miles south of Red Oak in the Fall of 1990.