

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE  
613 Howard Road, West Chester, PA 19380

29 January 2003

Arlene Koch  
1375 Raubsville Road  
Easton, PA 18042

Dear Arlene,

Thank you for submitting documentation of the Yellow Rail on 31 October 2001 in Williams Township. After careful review, the Committee has voted not to accept this record.

The vote was three members favoring acceptance and four members voting against it. Most of those who voted "no" placed the record in Class IV-B, "a record for which there exists insufficient evidence for evaluation." Following are two members' comments, which sum up the opinion of those who voted against acceptance:

\* "The experienced observer is admirably conservative and honest in her report. I really believe this was a Yellow Rail, but we have only two short sentences of plumage description (fourth paragraph) and the brief vocalization in the last paragraph. A rarity of this magnitude should have more details and (through no fault of the observer) a better look."

\* "I am tempted to accept this, and I have little doubt that the bird was correctly identified, but the details provided are just too scant. No mention of size or bill-shape, which given the details described should have been seen."

The Committee emphasizes that our non-acceptance does not imply a belief that the bird was not a Yellow Rail, but simply that the members felt more complete evidence was needed.

We hope that our non-acceptance in this case will not discourage you from submitting reports on any future rarities you may find.

Sincerely,



For the Committee:  
Paul Hess, Chair

Record No. 231-01-2001

11/26/01

231-01-2001

Yellow Rail, Northampton County

The morning of October 31, 2001, I was walking in my lower fields, an area of about 15 acres, where there are strips of short grass, rye, foxtail millet, sorghum, rape, sunflowers, field corn, and natural growth. I was looking for sparrows but, as it sometimes happens, in spite of its being a quiet, windless day, not many were showing themselves or responding to my spishing. I was closer to the bottom part of the fields near the creek than I was to the upper area by the knoll behind the house.

While walking on a path through one of the natural growth strips, where the vegetation was about 3 feet tall, I suddenly heard a bird calling no more than a few feet away from my feet. The sound, which I guess I should be embarrassed to admit that at first I didn't recognize, was practically on top of me. It was coming from the edge of weedy strip where asters and goldenrod ended and abutted a strip of 2- to 3-inch high grass. The bird didn't respond to any kind of call I made so, after a few minutes, I decided to move even though I knew that would probably flush it.

When I took a few steps out to where I could see the edge of the goldenrod a bird that I immediately recognized as a yellow rail ran across a 2-ft wide mowed area and into the short grass. Only once did I get another decent look at it as it almost tunneled through the grass. Eventually it went into and through a strip of 2-year-old field corn and then I lost track of it. In spite of standing there another 20 minutes, I couldn't relocate the rail.

Although at this point I had only had two short looks at the bird, they were good looks. And I was certainly very close to it. It had distinct buffy and black vertical lines running down its back and its face was also striped with buff. The only other bird I feel I could have confused it with at that point was a sora.

Both Dave De Reamus and Rick Wiltraut came and tried to find this bird but neither one had any luck and they eventually left. It wasn't until about 3:30 in the afternoon, when Jason Horn got my message and came down from his home in Emmaus, that I went back into the fields with him to look for it.

After walking through the area where I saw it and then into a lower strip of foxtail millet, the rail ran across a path cut through the millet strip. Jason was behind me on the other side of the strip and his face fell when I yelled "rail" because all he saw when he got to the path were two meadow voles.

Right at that moment two small game hunters who had permission to hunt our fields diverted our attention and I had to turn toward them and motion them not to come down where we were. When Jason and I turned back and looked at where the rail went, he saw movement in the foxtail millet but he never got a good look at what was making it.

Jason has brought along two small stones and he began tapping them together. In almost no time at all a bird began answering from the foxtail millet in an area that we had just walked out. Apparently the rail had run back into that portion of the millet while we were looking away. It answered him more than 20 times and I, frankly, was greatly relieved. When it stopped he jokingly asked me if I had a tape recorder in my pocket.

I realize that without photos or a recording of the bird this report will probably get rejected. But I decided to submit it anyway. The time was right, the habitat was right, and the tic, tic, tictictic was right. It's just a shame I couldn't have gotten its call taped.

Arlene Koch  
1375 Raubsville Road  
Easton, PA 18042  
Northampton County  
[Davidlene@aol.com](mailto:Davidlene@aol.com)  
610 253-6377

Postscript - I could say that it was the right size, etc., and then give a detailed description using a book, but that wouldn't be honest regarding the book I got. - Arlene

## Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

### Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*)

Date of Sighting: 31 October 2001 to 31 October 2001

Location: WILLIAMS TOWNSHIP

County: NORTHAMPTON

Observer(s): Arlene Koch, Jason Horn

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Arlene Koch

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

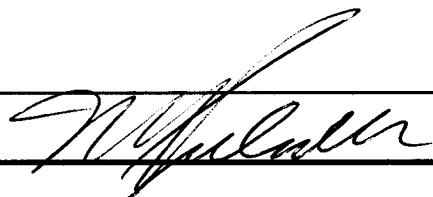
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead					X			
D. <del>Couchman</del> <sup>Heathcote</sup>		X						
P. Hess				X				
J. Stanley			X					
B. Reid			X					
R. Leberman					X			
M. Sharp					X			
TOTALS		1	2	1	3			
DECISION					X			

Comments: 3/4

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 8/24/02