









231-01-2006

UNUSUAL SIGHTING DOCUMENTATION

Species (common & scientific): Yellow Rail *Coturnicops noveboracensis*

Number of Individuals: 1 **Sex(es):** ?

Date Seen: 10/31/2006 **Time: Approx.** 8:30 AM

Where Seen (Town/County): Doylestown Twp., Bucks Co.

Exact Location (Park, Road, Lake): Pine Run Dam

Observer Reporting:

Name: August Mirabella

Address: 1443 Wheaton Lane
North Wales, PA 19454

E-mail: augustmirabella@aol.com

Telephone (optional): 215-368-0594

Other Observers (Only those who saw & identified the bird with you): None

Distance to Bird: 5 to 50 ft. in flight.

Viewing Conditions (Sky, weather, position of sun relative to you): Sun position was behind me but sun was blocked by a cloud at the time, so lighting was bright but not full sun.

Optical Equipment Used: 7X42 Zeiss Bins

Habitat: Pine Run is a flood control dam and lake with surrounding fields that are mowed several times a summer except for a several acre patch that was planted in warm season grasses last fall. This patch this year was a variety of "weeds" and has been a great spot for sparrows. The majority of the fields are fairly wet at times with some areas having patches of rushes. Due to recent heavy rain, the wet fields had standing water in some areas and were generally very wet. There is also a small stream (more like a ditch) that runs along the length of the property through the field, which has varying amounts of vegetation. Along the stream, there are long stretches of just grass, clumps of shrubs and small trees, and finally solid shrubs. Some areas along the stream have standing water with vegetation. This stream and the surrounding wet fields have produced annual fall sightings of Sora, Virginia Rail, Wilson's Snipe, Marsh Wrens, and in recent years Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows. This year and last there were Sedge Wrens. There is one report of Black Rail by competent observers. The end of the dam near the wet fields makes a right angle and has a wider area of high ground that slowly slopes to the field. This area is relatively dry and has what I call orchard grass, which is still thick and green now and I guess about 8" to 12" high. This area is where I flushed this bird. The other observers, who saw it later, flushed it in the wet meadow or along the grass edged area of the stream.

Description (only what you observed; size relative to other species present; posture, body shape & proportions; colors & patterns of plumage: I was walking very fast through this grass area having left the warm season grass "weed" patch chasing a Vesper Sparrow which had flown some distance. I had climbed the slope of the dam and was walking through the high ground before heading down to the lower area on the other side.

Apparently my fast pace startled the rail and it flushed. As E. Meadowlarks and Wilson's Snipe are frequently flushed here, my split second thought was these species, but I immediately saw large bold white wing patches. It flew just above the ground probably about 50 ft. before dropping back into the grass, and I went directly to the spot but saw no movement at all. It vanished. I made several passes through the area to no avail. Obviously, my observation time was only a few seconds but I did get the binoculars on it for most of the time that it was in the air.

The secondaries were the most striking feature, which in the short time I had the bird, presented what appeared to be large and bright white secondary patches. My eyes were drawn to the white patches, but I believe the surrounding wing area was dark, as I didn't note any contrast with the back. Frankly, in the short time of observation, I didn't note any variation in color on different portions of the wing. I also saw what at first seemed an all very dark back. I knew it wasn't a Black Rail due to the white wing patches. Fortunately, just as it braked to land, I saw it long enough to note lighter but definitely not white lengthwise streaking on the back. I saw no white on the back. The streaks were relatively wide as opposed to very fine and they were spaced so that I think the blackish background was predominant. The view was from the rear, so I noted nothing much about the head or neck other than they were apparently short. The tail was short, the body looked stubby, and the wings were wide and rounded. I didn't note the legs. The fact that it was so dark above may indicate a juvenile based on what I read.

Behavior (Be as specific as possible about what the bird was doing): Described above
Vocalizations: None

Supporting Evidence if Any (include with report): Photos taken by Devich Farbotnik on 11/5, which are definitive for this species.

Separation from Similar Species (How you eliminated others): The field guides say that Sora juvenile plumage should have a white trailing edge to the wings. I have studied many pictures and from what I could find, the amount of white on this bird exceeded anything one would expect on a Sora. It was striking and even more visible than what is shown in The Sibley Guide to Birds. It appeared more like what is shown in the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of N. America, 2nd Edition. Also, the non-white streaking on the dark back appears to be consistent with Yellow Rail and not Sora, which apparently should show some white spots.

Discussion (Anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it): Unlikely as it may seem, Ken Rieker flushed the bird on 11/5 for a similar in flight view. Devich Farbotnik having heard of Ken's report, went out at night with his intense spotlight and flushed the bird in a different spot but nearby and probably due to the spot light, the bird sat for a few seconds in the open to get video. On 11/7, Mike Homel flushed the bird in the same general area. That was the last report to my knowledge.

Previous Experience with this and/or Similar Species: Have only seen once before and for less time than I saw this one.

Are you positive of your ID? (Why or why not): Yes, I feel confident because of the small size, bold white wing patches, dark back with streaking, behavior, plus now the confirming video/video grabs.

References:

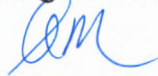
During Observation: None

After Observation:

1. The Sibley Guide to the Birds
2. Nat. Geographic Field Guide to the birds of N. America
3. Stokes Field Guide to Birds
4. Birds of N. America by Chandler Robbins
5. VIREO at the Academy of Natural Sciences - Yellow Rail & Sora
6. Slater Museum of Nat. History- Rails <http://www.ups.edu/x5855.xml> (Pictures of adult and juvenile Sora wings)
7. Personal communication from Matt Sharp as follows: "I just took a look at the specimens and the inner wings of the two birds are completely different. The inner secondaries on Yellow Rail are white, but on juv. Sora they are brown-gray. Under fluorescent lights they are slightly paler and lighter than the outer secs and the rest of the flight feathers. They do seem to be more translucent and reflect more than the rest of the wing but this is subtle and hard to describe. I think of the difference between a matte finish (Sora) and a semi-gloss finish (YERA) in paints but that is not really accurate analogy since it has more to do with reflection/translucence than the actual feather color which is pretty much like it is on the jpgs I sent (which are now on-line). My guess is that under natural light, and field conditions of a bird flushing away the inner secs on Sora could flash contrastingly paler than the rest of the wing and could easily fool someone hoping to tick a Yellow Rail (that is certainly not what I think you are doing here). I think the plate in Sibley may be trying to show this aspect more than accurately portraying the actual color of the inner wing which really is brown-gray."

Date of report: 11/1/2006; Rev. 11/7

Signature of Observer: August Mirabella



Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Yellow Rail Coturnicops noveboracensis

Date of Sighting: 31 October 2006 to 7 November 2006

Location: PINE RUN

County : BUCKS

Observer(s): A. Mirabella, K. Reiker, D. Farbotnik M. Homel

Date of Submission: 2006

Submitted by: A. Mirabella, D. Farbotnik

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: No

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV-A | Class IV-B | Class IV-C | Class V | Abstain |
|-------------|---------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|---------|---------|
| R. Wiltraut | X | | | | | | | |
| A. Guarente | X | | | | | | | |
| T. Johnson | X | | | | | | | |
| J. Stanley | | | | | | | | |
| E. Witmer | X | | | | | | | |
| J. Heller | X | | | | | | | |
| G. Malosh | X | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS | 6 | | | | | | | |
| DECISION | X | | | | | | | |

Comments: 6/0

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

7/30/07