

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2013-07-21 19:23:14
Observer's Name	Matt Wlasniewski
E-mail	martind28@comcast.net
Phone	610-463-8845
Observer's Address	Street Address: 21 Scenic Drive City: Hamburg State / Province: PA Postal / Zip Code: 19526 Country: United States
Names of additional observers	Kathy Grim, Joan Silagy, Rudy Keller, Joanne Kintner, Mike Slater, Ken Lebo, Peter Wolfe, Jane Wolfe, Ryan Fick, Jim Eckert.
Species (Common Name)	Black Rail
Species (Scientific Name)	laterallus jamaicensis
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Assumed adult.
Observation Date and Time	05-24-2013 6:40 PM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Not yet (please do, eBird is great!)
Link to eBird checklist	NA
County	Berks
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Reading, 19607
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Per request of finder, exact location will remain undisclosed. It is between Reading and Knauers.
Habitat	Marsh, wet area, of mainly reed canarygrass with small patches of spindly trees and a few bushes. Some snags out in marsh.
Distance to bird	At times, less than five feet by my estimate and maximum fifty feet as the rail moved around.
Viewing conditions	Bird was seen at 6:40AM. No precipitation. Slightly cloudy. It was light but not mid-day bright.
Optical equipment used	No optics used.

Description

I met Kathy Grim at location where she had first heard the rail on May 20 while walking her dog around 5:30AM. She listened to rail's call on a website and then called Joan Silagy to discuss. Kathy was sure it was a Black Rail. Joan came to hear the bird and confirmed it. I was told of the bird on May 23 but couldn't come until May 24th. Ken Lebo recorded the call attached to this file on May 23rd which he confirmed as Black Rail. I met Kathy at 6:00AM and the rail was calling as I got out of my truck and it called continually until I left at 7:00AM. The rail liked the area directly in front of us behind a wooden rail fence. There is a small stream that flows left to right that is covered by a thick canopy of fallen reed grass. This canopy made it impossible to see the bird as it moved right in front of us. I expected to see it on my foot as times. The bird would cease calling to move and then start again from a new spot. I listened with Kathy for 40 minutes then as she was looking at an Eastern Kingbird on a snag, I was keeping my eye on an open area in the reeds about 12-15 feet from me. The gap in the reeds was about three ft deep and two ft wide. It was a small clearing with no obstructions to viewing. I thought I saw the head of a bird poke out from the left side of the gap and then the rail made a dash across the opening. It ran with its neck outstretched like a chicken would and disappeared into the reeds. I saw it for two seconds max but I got a good look at it. Naked eye. About ten minutes later, after I moved to the right, the bird stuck its head out of some vegetation but did not make a further move. It called as I got into my vehicle and left for work. This marsh is several acres of Reed canarygrass but the rail liked an area no more than 50 ft deep and 50 feet wide.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

I listened to rail call for about an hour with only breaks when the rail moved to a new location. It walked in the stream, I suppose, under the canopy, left to right in front of us. When the rail ran across the gap, it stretched its neck out like a chicken and did not hesitate at all. No one played the rail call to entice the bird to call. It started on its own. On June 24th, four of us met to listen to the rail and had to wait over a half hour before it started but we decided it did not like the fireworks that had been detonated somewhere down the road. Once it started to call, it did so without stopping. I was able to see the whole rail as it ran. It appeared the length of a sparrow but more plump or round than a sparrow of course. It appeared all black to me with black/dark legs and a small black bill. Eye was dark but I couldn't see any color. The speckles on its back were not visible since I didn't have much time.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

Virginia Rail- Eliminated due to difference in overall size and length and shape of bill.

Yellow Rail- Eliminated because of light color and streaking of adult and light brown color of juvenile. Both of these ages have light bellies which this Black Rail did not have.

Sora- Eliminated due to size overall and bill size and yellow color on Sora. I have seen several Sora. There was no light streaking on the belly of the Black Rail or white in plumage like the Sora.

I have heard Black Rails calling in Port Mahon, Delaware and also the one Black Rail found a few years ago in the farmland around Kempton, PA.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

I was impressed with the speed of the bird, its small size and blackness. Also, its call never stopped. It had an extra 'kik' in the beginning at times. All of the other birders heard the bird for a good length of time. All were asked to keep the location quiet as requested by the person who found the bird.

The rail was last heard on June 28th in the morning. It was heard for 28 days.

If the recording doesn't work, I saved an email that I can forward to whoever needs to hear it.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

Yes. The call was compared to recordings on the Web and Peterson's. My sighting although short helped me eliminate Sora and Yellow Rail and Va Rail. This rail was small and all black. I definitely did not see any light brown or streaking in this bird.

During

Before I saw bird, I listened to Black Rail and other rail calls.

After

Sibley's and Peterson's and Nat'l Geographic guides.

Supporting evidence (check all that apply)

Audio

Upload images, audio, video or drawings

[Black Rail May 23 2013 call IMG_0800.MOV](#)

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