

235-01-2004

#### UNUSUAL SIGHTING DOCUMENTATION

**Species (common & scientific):** King Rail *rallus elegans*

**Number of Individuals:** 2      **Sex(es):** ?

**Age(s) & Plumage(s):** Not seen-adults

**Date Seen:** April 25, 2004      **Time: Approx.** 7:30 – 9:30AM

**Found:** April 24, 2004 by ??

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

**Exact Location (Park, Road, Lake):** Quakertown Swamp, Muskrat Rd.

**Observer Reporting:**

**Name:** August Mirabella

**Address:** 1443 Wheaton Lane  
North Wales, PA 19454

**E-mail:** [augustmirabella@aol.com](mailto:augustmirabella@aol.com)

**Telephone (optional):** 215-368-0594

**Other Observers (Only those who saw & identified the bird with you):** Judy Mirabella

**Distance to Bird:** As close as 25 feet at edge of swamp.

**Viewing Conditions (Sky, weather, position of sun relative to you):** Clear

**Optical Equipment Used:** Not applicable.

**Habitat:** Large Swamp with scrub, cattails, and some open water.

**Description (only what you observed; size relative to other species present; posture, body shape & proportions; colors & patterns of plumage; bill, eye, & leg characteristics; other features relevant to this individual):** No sighting

**Behavior (Be as specific as possible about what the bird was doing):** Calling continuously and approached closely upon playing a tape but vegetation between us and the swamp blocked the view.

**Vocalizations:** The primary call heard was the kik-kerrrr over and over. Playing a tape copied from the Peterson series "A Field Guide to Bird Songs of Eastern & Central N. Amer." (about 30+ years old), resulted in a response of the loud deep yuk-yuk-yuk-yuk-.... call twice at close range.

**Supporting Evidence if Any (include with report):**

Audio Recording: I believe Devich Farbotnik, [birdwatcher24\\_7@yahoo.com](mailto:birdwatcher24_7@yahoo.com) & Rick Wiltraut, [rwiltraut@STATE.PA.US](mailto:rwiltraut@STATE.PA.US) got audiotapes and I assume they will submit them eventually.

**Separation from Similar Species (How you eliminated others):** The easy answer is that it or they sounded just like the recordings referenced below. The Peterson's Guide tape of the yuk call caused an exact duplicate response. The yuk did not have the very nasal or very raspy sound of the Virginia Rails that were also calling and was lower pitched. There is a slight sharpness to it, making it not completely musical either. It was similar to a Clapper Rail yuk series except much slower in cadence and shorter in overall duration. The Clapper series of low-pitched yuks also slowly tapers off and accelerates. The King

is a more consistent in loudness, cadence, and tone, and only very briefly tapers off at the end. The latter is what we heard.

According to the Stoke's Guide, the kerrrr trill part of the kik-kerrrr call is longer on the King than the Clapper. I can't remember hearing that call from a Clapper but the duration of the call we heard, I believe, is consistent with the longer duration as heard on the recording. Also, Stoke's indicates the kik part is repeated multiple times for Clapper while the King is only once (Sibley says twice for both). We heard only one or at most two kiks. The repeated kek calls that are faster and accelerate on a Clapper compared to the steady slower King were not given while we were there.

**Previous Experience with this and/or Similar Species:** Have heard Clapper many, many times over 35 years and the call is well imprinted in the brain.

**Are you positive of your ID?** (Why or why not): I believe the calls were definitive.

**References:**

During Observation: Peterson's "A Field Guide to Bird Songs of Eastern & Central N. America"

After Observation: The above & Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs, Eastern Region

**Date of report:** 5/4/04

**Signature of Observer:** August Mirabella



# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

## Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: King Rail (*Rallus elegans*)

Date of Sighting: 24 April 2004 to 25 April 2004

Location: QUAKERTOWN SWAMP

County : BUCKS

Observer(s): August Mirabella, Devich Farbotnik et al.

Date of Submission: 2004

Submitted by: August Mirabella, Devich Farbotnik

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: Audio

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut								
<del>D. Heathcote</del> <i>Guarante</i>			X					
P. Guris	X							
J. Stanley	X							
E. Witmer			X					
<del>R. Leberman</del> <i>Heller</i>	X							
M. Sharp	X							
TOTALS	4		2					
DECISION	X							

Comments: 6/0

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

9/17/06