

L. O. S. Bird Record's Committee Report Form

- 1. English and scientific name:** Yellow Rail. Coturnicops noveboracensis.
- 2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage:** 5
- 3. Locality. Louisiana:** Jefferson Davis Parish, 6 miles N. of Roanoke (north of Interstate 10), at the junction of State Hiways 395 & 102.
- 4. Date(s) seen:** 19 November 1988
- 5. Times of day seen:** 1400 hours
- 6. Reporting observer and address:** Gwen & Al Smalley, 88 Egret Street, New Orleans, LA 70124.
- 7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird:** John Sevenair
- 8. Other observers who independently identified the bird:** None.
- 9. Light conditions:** Clear, excellent light.
- 10. Optical equipment:** 10X 40 Zeiss binoculars.
- 11. Distance to bird:** Varied as described below. From about 10 feet to 50-60 yards.
- 12. Duration of observation:** For each individual bird, about 10 seconds; total length of observing period, about 45 minutes.
- 13. Habitat:** Large rice field.
- 14. Behavior:** (a) flushing in front of combine, in nearly level flight about 6 feet from ground, dropping into the rice stubble after a flight of about 20-30 yards, (b) one bird seen at close range (about 10 feet) along roadside ditch, assumed to be a bird flushed by combine and seeking cover, possible confused.
- 15. Description:** The birds were seen in a very large field, being worked by

two combines; they appeared sparrow-sized when they were flushed by the combines from around the center of the field. Small, stubby, brown birds, darker than Al remembered from previous observations, but too distant to discern details of dorsal pattern. Rapid wing beat. On every bird that we were sure were Yellow Rails, we saw the white wing patches unequivocally, both in flight, but better when the bird dropped down to the ground. In addition, details of bill shape could not be seen, but the bill was obviously "stubby". An accurate count is difficult because the birds could conceivably drop back into the mowed stubble, and then run into the uncut rice, to be flushed again; five birds is our best guess.

One bird seen at close range as we were walking back to the car along the hiway, running on the side of the levee; observation time perhaps five seconds. Short light bill seen clearly, as well as light ochre flanks, with darker back. The bird did not fly.

16. Voice: No vocalization

17. Similar species: Sora probably the most confusing; when flushing at a distance, seeing the white wing patch of a Yellow Rail, or the black face of a Sora, is a necessity for reliable ID. They are very similar in shape and flight outline, and the size difference is useless at the distances of these observations. Although we did not see Soras in this field, our previous and subsequent experience indicates that they are common in the rice fields, sometimes the most common rail. Virginia Rail is somewhat larger and has an entirely different bill shape. Black Rails have not been found in rice fields so far (they would normally be found wintering closer to the coast), but can't really be ruled out. King Rails can be eliminated by size. Again, if observers are not close enough to rule out Blacks and Virginias (not to mention sparrows), they shouldn't report Yellows.

18. Photographs: None

19. Previous experience with species: Gwen saw about five at somewhat closer range on 11 Nov 1988, and about six on the old Anahuac Rail Buggy trip. Al was on the latter trip, and also has flushed birds from underfoot, one in LA, and one in PA.

20. Aids: Books etc. (a) at time of observation: None.

(b) after observation: None.

21. This description written from: notes made during

observation; X notes made after observation; X memory.
(Reviewed early versions of an article Gwen was preparing immediately
after these observations).

22. Are you positive of your observation? Yes.

23. Signature of reporter:

Alfred E. Jones

24. Date and time of this account: May 29, 1990.

LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

89-34

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of unusual birds. It may be used flexibly and need not be used at all. Leave blank any details not observed. Attach additional sheets if necessary. Please print or type. Attach drawings, photographs, etc.; include all photos if an obscurely marked species. When completed, mail to the Secretary of the LOS Bird Records Committee.

1. Common and scientific name: YELLOW RAIL, *Coturnicops noveboracensis*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g. 2ad. in breeding plumage): 5
3. Locality: Louisiana: 6MI N. OF ROANOKE Parish: JEFFERSON DAVIS
N. OF I10 AND ROANOKE, HWY 395 AND 102
4. Date(s) when seen: NOV 19, 1988
5. Times of day when seen: 2:00 PM
6. Reporting observer and address: GWEN SMALLER
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird:
AL SMALLER + JOHN SEVENAIR
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird:
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): GOOD.
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition):
11. Distance to bird: ZEISS 10x40
12. Duration of observation: 50 TO 60 YARDS
13. Habitat (general and specific): 10 SER.
RICE FIELD
14. Behavior (flying, feeding, resting, etc.; include and stress any habits used in identification): BIRDS FLUSHED FROM COMBINE.
15. Description (Include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen. Include if possible: total length; body bulk; shape, bill, eye, and leg characteristics; color and pattern of plumage, etc. Stress field marks):
SAME AS FIRST PAGE

REPORT TO THE
LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

1. Common and scientific name:
Yellow Rail, Coturnicops noveboracensis
2. Number of individuals seen, sexes, ages, general plumage, etc.
About five individuals were seen flushing in front of a combine harvesting rice. The total number of individual birds was difficult to determine because of the possibility that some birds were flushed twice.
3. Locality:
In Jefferson Davis Parish, LA, in a rice field on the south side of LA 102 west of Hathaway and north of Roanoke.
4. Date(s) when seen:
19 November 1988
5. Times of day when seen:
Early in the afternoon
6. Reporting observer and address:
John P. Sevenair, 325 Stafford Place, New Orleans, LA 70124
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird:
Gwen and Al Smalley
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird:
None that I know of
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and amount of light):
As I recall, the birds were seen in full sunlight. There was no shade in the field. We observed the birds from the north (road) and east sides of the field.
10. Optical equipment:
Bushnell Custom 10 x 50 binoculars.
11. Distance to bird:
100-200 feet (very approximately)
12. Duration of observation:
Each individual sighting lasted about 5-10 seconds as the birds flushed in front of the combine and dropped back into the stubble. We watched the combine for perhaps 15-30 min.
13. Habitat (general and specific):
The birds were seen in a rice field that was in the process of being cut. After the combine passed we could see that the field was muddy with a few pools of water.
14. Behavior (flying, feeding, resting, etc.; include and stress any habits used in identification):
As noted above, the birds flushed one by one in front of a rice combine as a field of rice was harvested. The birds made short, clumsy flights and landed 20-60 feet from the combine, out of its direct path, in the unharvested rice or in the stubble of the newly cut portion of the field.

15. Description (Include what was actually seen, not what should have been seen. Include if possible: total length; body bulk; shape, bill, eye, and leg characteristics; color and pattern of plumage, etc.

This is a description from memory, a memory which is rather vague by this time (a year and a half after the event).

The birds were small (very much smaller than Cattle Egrets and an American Bittern that were seen at the same time, and smaller than King Rails; I remember no smaller birds that were present and that would make a good comparison). They were a rather pale brown, paler than female red-winged blackbirds, and had conspicuous white areas on their wings that showed clearly as they flew. Their flight seemed to involve a lot of energy expenditure for a relatively short flight at slow speed.

16. Voice:

Not heard

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observations):

Black Rails are darker and smaller, and (like other rails) have no conspicuous white area on the wing. King Rails are larger (as I recall, we saw a few King Rails flushing in front of the combine with the Yellow Rails). Soras are grayer.

The various species of blackbirds that frequent fields are darker than these birds were and have no white on the wings. They are also much better flyers than these birds were. Blackbirds would have flown much faster and further when flushed than these birds did, and would have flushed as a group rather than one after another.

Maggies? Too large, long-tailed and showy. Phainopeplas, Crested Mynas? Too dark, wrong habits and habitat. Snow Buntings? Too pale. Lark Buntings? Too late in the year to have the white wing areas of breeding plumage. (These species all have white in their wings). None of these seem at all reasonable. Admittedly I didn't see these birds very well, but if they weren't Yellow Rails, I don't know what they could be.

18. Photographs:

None

19. Previous experience with this species:

I saw Yellow Rails from the old Anahuac rail buggy in April of 1984. That is my only other experience with the species.

20. Aids: List books, illustrations, birders, etc. used in identification

a) At the time of observation:

None

b) After observation:

National Geographic Society, Field Guide to the Birds of North America.

21. This description written from: _____ Notes made during observation; _____ notes made after observation; x memory.

This sighting was made at a time when I went birding to relax, and took field notes on very rare occasions. The Secretary of the LBRC has encouraged me to submit memory records in the past, and here's another one. I hope it helps.

22. Are you positive of your identification? yes If not, explain:

23. Signature of reporter:

John P. Severain

24. Date and time of writing this account:
21 May 1990 at 10:00 PM.