

LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the LBRC Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or this format when submitting records for review (to assure that all information involving an observation is accounted for). Attach additional sheets if necessary. Please print or type. Attach drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos if an obscurely marked species. When completed, mail to: LBRC Secretary, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216.

1. ENGLISH AND SCIENTIFIC NAMES:

Yellow Rail (Coturnicops noveboracensis).

2. NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS, SEXES, AGES, GENERAL PLUMAGE (e.g., 2 ad. in breeding plumage):

at least 9 individuals, one specimen LSUMZ No. (DLD 2879).

3. LOCALITY: LOUISIANA; Jefferson Davis Par.;
(state) (parish)

1 mi. N Hwy. 14 X Hwy. 99 (due south of Welsh)
(specific locality)

4. DATE(S) WHEN SEEN: 5 November 1988.

5. TIMES OF DAY WHEN SEEN: 1:00 - 3:00 PM.

6. REPORTING OBSERVER AND ADDRESS: Steven W. Cardiff and Donna L. Dittmann
LSU Museum of Natural Science
Baton Rouge, LA 708037. OTHER OBSERVERS ACCOMPANYING REPORTER WHO ALSO IDENTIFIED THE BIRD:

Curtis A. Marantz.

8. OTHER OBSERVERS WHO INDEPENDENTLY IDENTIFIED THE BIRD: none.

9. WEATHER/LIGHT CONDITIONS (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light):

clear, cool, dry, moderate NW winds. All birds seen in excellent light with sun at our backs.

10. OPTICAL EQUIPMENT (type, power, condition):

Leitz 8 X 40 (DLD) and Bushnell Custom 10 X 50 (SWC) binoculars in good condition.

11. DISTANCE TO BIRD: 10 - 300 meters. (plus one caught by hand)

12. DURATION OF OBSERVATION:

off and on over a two hour period. Total time when birds were actually in view was about 5 min.

13. HABITAT: rice field in process of being harvested by combine.

14. BEHAVIOR OF BIRD/CIRCUMSTANCES OF OBSERVATION (flying, feeding, resting, etc. - include and stress any habits used in identification; relate events surrounding the observation):

We were driving south on Hwy. 99 on a Saturday afternoon when we noticed a rice harvesting operation in a field on the east edge of the highway. With Yellow Rail in mind, we decided it would be worth spending some time watching for birds flushing in front of the machines. Two fields were being cut simultaneously by two different combines, which were clearing the fields in clockwise circuits around the perimeter. We watched for at least 15 minutes without seeing any Yellow Rails flushed, but we did see two American Bitterns and sparrows being flushed and this kept us interested. Harvesting was briefly interrupted several times when the driver of one of the combines became curious about what we were looking for or had to go dump a load of rice. One field was much smaller than the other and eventually the combine that was working the large field came over and began helping clear the small field. When the small field had been about half cleared, DLD suddenly shouted that she had seen a Yellow Rail flush in front of a combine on the far side of the field. The bird had flown low and directly away from us out of the field and out of view. During the next several circuits of the combines we had distant views of one or two more birds. We saw the majority of individuals when the field was 70-99% cut. During this phase, we had moved well out into the field and the combines were passing with a few meters of us. We stood in the stubble at the south end of the remaining patch of uncut rice. Most of the birds would flush from the eastern edge or southeastern corner of the rice patch and would fly with the wind from left to right directly in front of us at heights of 5-20 ft. Three or four of the birds flew for at least 100-300 m to the southeast into the next ricefield over. Another bird flushed up too high and seemed to be caught in a strong gust of wind that carried up to 40-50 ft. above the ground and blew it even farther out into the same field. Other birds would flush and quickly land in the cut stubble, while a few would flush and fly back into the uncut rice, only to be flushed again as the patch became smaller and smaller. All individuals seemed to have relatively long, narrow wings for their size. Flight was usually low and direct, with rapid, shallow, continuous wingbeats. Feet could be seen extending slightly beyond the tail on closer birds. We tried to chase down three birds that landed in the cut stubble. One immediately flushed again as we approached the area where it had landed. The second was not seen again. The third was captured by hand after we spotted it as it tried to conceal itself in some rice stems in a tire track. We only counted birds that left the field or landed in the stubble. When the small field was cleared, the combines moved back into the larger field that was being worked earlier. We watched this field for another 1/2 - 1 hour and saw the machine flush 3-4 Yellow Rails. Because we knew that at least 3-4 birds had flown into this field from the small field, we did not add these to the total. We also saw the combines flush 5 Soras, 1 Virginia's Rail, another American Bittern, and several LeConte's Sparrows. The harvesters quit for the day at 3:00 PM.

15. DESCRIPTION (include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen. Include if possible: total length or relative size compared to other species present or familiar species; body bulk, shape, and proportions; bill, eye, leg and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):

(from specimen) A small rail, smaller than Sora, relatively small bill and short tarsi. Upperparts generally black. Pale brown lateral edges to feathers of the

nape and back, and to the upperwing coverts and tertials giving streaked appearance to mantle area. Feathers of entire upperparts, sides, flanks, uppertail, upperwing coverts, and tertials also with thin white terminal and subterminal bars. Primaries dark brownish-gray. Outer 5-6 pairs secondaries with distal halves mostly white. Center of forehead, center of crown, and hindcrown also black with faint dark brown flecks and small white flecks of partial white bars. Face, including broad supercilium, auriculars, and cheeks pale buffy-brown with dark brown or blackish edges, giving scalloped appearance. Breast and sides of neck also buffy-brown with heavier brownish-black scalloping. Throat buffy-white. Very center of breast unscalloped buffy-white. Belly white, contrasting strongly with black-and-white barred flanks. Undertail coverts mostly dull dark chestnut. Iris dark brown. Extreme base and basal edges of maxilla dull green, rest dark horn brown. Mandible dull brownish-green blending to dark horn brown distal 1/2. Tarsi and feet dark brown. The specimen is an immature with a large bursa, and is relatively heavily marked on the chest. All flying birds, even those some distance away, appeared very blackish above, and had conspicuous white patches on the distal portions of the outer secondaries. Some of the birds that passed close to us seemed more clear buffy on the breast and may have been adults, but we can't say for sure.

16. VOICE: none heard.

17. SIMILAR SPECIES (include how they are eliminated by your observations):

Nothing else comes close.

18. PHOTOGRAPHS OR TAPE RECORDINGS OBTAINED (By whom? Attached?):

several slides by SWC of hand-held bird attached.

19. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SPECIES:

none.

20. IDENTIFICATION AIDS (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a) at time of observation: none.

b) after observation: none.

21. THIS DESCRIPTION WRITTEN FROM: _____ notes made during observation; _____ notes made after observation (date: _____); X memory; X specimen.

22. ARE YOU POSITIVE OF YOUR IDENTIFICATION? YES. If not, explain:

23. SIGNATURE OF REPORTER: *Steven W. Cardiff* *Donna L. Dittmann*

24. DATE AND TIME OF WRITING THIS ACCOUNT: 22 February 1989, 3:30 PM.