

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <zoiseaux@lusfiber.net> .

1. English and Scientific names: Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): One adult plumaged individual, sex unknown
3. Parish: St. John the Baptist
Specific Locality: About 0.5 mile north of Peavine Rd along Old Hwy 51 at a trailhead/parking area of the Maurepas Swamp WMA
4. Date(s) when observed: 26 December 2017
5. Time(s) of day when observed: about 1:30 PM
6. Reporting observer and address: Joshua Sylvest, 321 N. Millet Ave, (P.O. Box 1543) Gramercy, LA 70052
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): David Sylvest
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): none
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Skies were overcast, there were no extreme light conditions or lighting hindrances
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): none
11. Distance to bird(s): between 15 and 20 feet
12. Duration of observation: ~4 seconds

13. Habitat: A marshy depression of predominantly cutgrass and smartweed, there was little to no water on the depression surface at the time. It's surrounded by a larger mosaic of marsh and swamp, situated between Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): The bird was observed in flight only. My truck had been parked and turned off for several minutes as we were updating our lists. David first noticed the bird and called my attention to it. When I looked up I first saw it through the windshield, it was flying right to left about 1.5-2 ft off the ground, and was already beyond being directly in front of me by several degrees, giving me a brief glimpse of the side of the bird. A longer observation was made from the driver's side window where I had good dorsal views until the bird dropped, sort of both head and feet first, into the marshy edge. I imagine the bird may have been crossing the open (parking) area where the grass is maintained and much shorter; the distance between the taller grass marshy areas where I believe the bird to have come from and where I eventually saw it land was about 40 feet. Based on where I was parked and when I saw the bird, I observed about 4 seconds of the bird traversing the final 20-25ft.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*): My initial observation through the windshield allowed only "general impression" type processing: the size, overall color and flight style were noted. The bird was very small, perhaps cowbird-sized, but without any obvious tail. The only color I picked up through the windshield was a solidly dark, grayish black plumage. The wings were in constant motion given that the bird was in flight so they mostly appeared blurry initially. The flight was direct but with a "fluttery" quality. Subsequent views from the side window revealed more detail about their shape, which appeared to be rounded. They also appeared to be a more brownish gray in color, slightly lighter than the rest of the bird, but I do not know how much of that can be attributed to the movement of the wings versus their true color. Additional plumage characteristics were seen best from the side window as the bird was flying away from me. A clear, 3-second observation at this point allowed me to note a rich chestnut patch on the nape of the bird. This area was well demarcated and stood out well between the black crown and white-spotted back. I did not ever clearly see the face, bill or eye of the bird. I only took note of the legs and feet as the bird dropped into the grass, and can only say that they were dark and the toes appeared long and dainty.

16. Voice: We attempted playback for a while and several time later in the day, including after dark. Immediately following the observation I thought I may have heard a single "doo" note, matching in quality the third syllable of the "kee-kee-doo" I was playing, but highway noise left me unsure and was problematic.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Any other rails that size and that dark can be eliminated by the time of year. They would also lack the distinct chestnut nape patch and white speckling below it. Sora and Virginia would also be disqualified by those plumage characteristics in addition to dainty, dark-colored legs, and the smaller overall size of our bird, and overall blackish plumage.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): No. Don't I wish...

19. Previous experience with this species: Books, photos, videos only.

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a. at time of observation: I reviewed with David the depictions in Petersen's Eastern Guide and National Geographic immediately following the observation. He knew immediately that it was strange and different in size and structure, but was unfamiliar with Black Rail plumage characteristics. The "bright brown spot" on the neck was something he had keyed in on during his time watching the bird so he needed to compare that to what he'd seen, compare size information and plumage of other rails, etc.

b. after observation: none

21. This description is written from:

<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	26 Dec 2017
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	memory		
<input type="checkbox"/>	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: Yes. While the observation was brief and the encounter bizarre and atypical for the species, what I did observe and the plumage characteristics that I saw well do not leave any other options.

23. Date: 23 Jan 2017

Time: 9:00 AM

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?

Yes _____

If yes, may we include your name with the report? ___ Yes _____