

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): **1, "adult" plumage, unknown sex**
3. Parish: **Cameron**
Specific Locality: **Broussard Beach**
4. Date(s) when observed: **15 February 2017**
5. Time(s) of day when observed: **8:15 pm**
6. Reporting observer and address: **Erik I. Johnson, 102 Goodwood Cir., Lafayette, LA 70508**
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): **Katrina Hucks, Samantha Hauser, Samantha Collins, Angela Trahan, Patti Holland**
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): **dark, no moon, clear star-lit sky; we had several strong headlamps and Q-beams**
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): **none**
11. Distance to bird(s): **First saw it walk across grass about 2 feet in front of me – it than ran about 5 feet. We approached, and were within inches of it (although it was obscured by grass) when it flew past and between four of our faces.**

12. Duration of observation: about 30 seconds to a minute

13. Habitat: High brackish marsh, between beach and road. Bordered to the north by giant cane, and the south by Broussard Beach. The bird was observed in a nearly pure patch of knee-high *Distichlis spicata*, with a little sea ox-eye (*Borrchia frutescens*) mixed in, but more broadly surrounded by thicker clumps dominated by *Borrchia*, with scattered patches of *Spartina patens/spartinae*. Because of recent rains that passed through the day before, the ground where the bird was found had about angle-deep water, but there were plenty of dry patches on higher ground. I don't know if we pushed the bird into this spot from a nearby thicker and drier *Borrchia* patch, or if was naturally there already.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Six of us were dragging a 50-foot rope with 5 rock-filled milk cartons, looking for rails in the dark. I was on the right side, dragging the rope, and noticed movement almost at my feet. The bird was first seen walking between clumps of raised *Distichlis* across a ~6" wide matt of flatted *Distichlis*. It was only in the open for a brief second, and I can't say that I saw the bill, nor the dark red patch on the back, but it was clearly dark with mouse-like movements. I saw the legs as it ran back into the grass. Once it disappeared, the vegetation ahead moved a little and a group of four of us ran up to the bird. As we slowly walked the area, and parted vegetation with our hands, it flushed and flew right past us, landing about 15 feet away. We looked for it again to no avail. We then passed through the area two more times with the drag line, but could not relocate it. We then moved on.

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*): This was a sparrow-sized bird, and I had a good sense of size having done this for two evenings in TX with USFWS biologists in mid-January. We had also already seen and caught 2 Virginia Rails and 3 Yellow Rails in the previous hour (+/-), so I had a good sense of perspective in terms of size and movement. Honestly, very few plumage features were seen, except that it was clearly dark, and maybe half the size of a Yellow Rail. I saw the legs as it disappeared into the grass. Then when the bird flushed, although we only briefly saw it while it was in the air for about 3 seconds, it clearly flew like a small rail, and there wasn't much of a tail to notice. Multiple lights were on the airborne bird. We had flushed several Sedge Wrens, and a couple of sparrows over the course of the evening, which had a very different flight pattern – Sedge Wrens being smaller and more moth-like, sparrows being longer-tailed, more strong and efficient in flight, and flying much longer distances.

16. Voice: not heard

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Other rails

larger, not black. No potential confusion with juvenile Clapper Rails or coots given the time of year. I suppose a small mammal could be considered, but this animal eventually flew, and I saw the legs when it briefly walked across the grass. I have considered the possibility of two different organisms (one seen, one flying), but BOTH observations were consistent with Black Rail.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): no

19. Previous experience with this species: A month ago I had been part of a team that caught four and saw one Black Rail over two nights during a Black Rail meeting in TX (San Bernard NWR). Any experience prior to that is mostly irrelevant and/or circumstantial – a couple times I had flushed a bird during the day, and heard them a few times, both in LA and in TX.

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 is written from:

<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	memory		
<input type="checkbox"/>	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: Yes. Given the behavior, size, location, and recent experience in similar conditions, there is no other explanation in my mind of what this was.

23. Date: 16 February 2017

Time: 11:15am

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