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## NOTES ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE YELLOW RAIL IN MICHIGAN.<sup>1</sup>

BY NORMAN A. WOOD.

THE YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) has so seldom been recorded from Michigan that, as I have recently obtained some additional data on its occurrence in the State, it seems advisable to publish these in connection with a review of the literature on the subject. In Michigan, as in the neighboring territory, owing to its rareness, secretiveness, or both, very little is known of the habits or local distribution of this species.

The first record is that of Abraham Sager (1839, p. 416), who gives it in his list of Michigan birds under the old name of *Rallus noveboracensis* Bon. It was next recorded by Manly Miles (1861, p. 230) in his list of Michigan birds as *Porzana noveboracensis* Bd. Neither of these writers give definite locality records.

In 1875 Major A. H. Boies (1875), of Hudson, Michigan, published a list of the 'Birds of Southern Michigan' in which he gives this species as a "summer sojourner." I have recently written Major Boies concerning this record and he has replied as follows: "The Yellow Rail referred to in my Catalogue, Birds of Southern Michigan, was taken by me in the summer of 1865, and being a female — adult — I gave it as a summer sojourner."

In his paper, 'The Migration of Michigan Birds,' Dr. J. B. Steere (1881, p. 123) includes the "Little Yellow Rail" in the list of birds nesting in Michigan and wintering to the south, but gives

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<sup>1</sup> From the University Museum, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.



no localities; and the same is true of Gibbs's paper, 'Annotated List of Michigan Birds' (1879, p. 493), in which he says of this species: "Rather rare, occasionally taken in spring, probably breeds." The last named writer in an article (1890, p. 230) on the Yellow Rail in Michigan says: "Never until now has my acceptance of the bird as a Michigan species been verified by myself. At dusk on Oct. 19, 1890, as two hunters of renown of this city (Kalamazoo), Messrs. O'Byrne and Francoise, were returning from a snipe shoot they flushed an immature specimen of this interesting little bird from thick grass on low land near water. Noticing it flew peculiarly and was a bird new to them they shot it and gave it to me. One mark they noted in particular which may be a point of identification when the bird is on the wing — the white spot on secondaries is plainly to be seen. They say that the bird sprung up with more vigor and flew swifter than the other rails." This specimen is now in the collection of the University of Michigan Museum.

In A. B. Covert's manuscript notes, now in the University of Michigan Museum, there is a short note on this species as follows: "Sept. 13, 1877, nine specimens were shot near Ann Arbor, of which one was secured by myself, and is now in the University Museum. Rest made a dinner for hunter." This specimen cannot be found, but there is little doubt as to the validity of the record. In his list of the birds of Washtenaw County, Mr. Covert (1881, p. 191) writes of the species as follows: "*Porzana noveboracensis*: a rare migrant."

In reply to a letter requesting additional data on the occurrence of the species within our limits, Prof. Walter B. Barrows, Michigan Agricultural College, has kindly sent me the following notes: "One or two were taken in muskrat traps at Vicksburg, Michigan, by D. Corwin of that place; another specimen was picked up mutilated and too much decomposed for preservation, in the center of Kalamazoo City, about the middle of Sept., 1900. This specimen was doubtless killed by flying against the telephone wires (Dr. M. Gibbs, *The Bittern*, Grand Rapids, 1901, p. 4). Dr. Gibbs also records another specimen taken in autumn (date not specified) near Kalamazoo, by Wm. O'Byrne (*Bull. Mich. Orn. Club*, II, 1898, p. 7) [probably the same specimen referred to by Gibbs (1890, p. 230)]; and there is a mounted specimen in the



Barron collection at Niles, which was examined by the writer in November, 1905. This specimen has no label, but undoubtedly was taken in the vicinity.

"Jerome Trombley, Petersburg, Mich., has a set of four eggs, which in size and coloration meet perfectly the requirements for this species, and which were taken May 29, 1894, in the township of Ida, Monroe County, Mich. Mr. Trombley did not take the eggs himself, but his collector described the bird which was flushed from the nest, and his description tallied well with that of the Yellow Rail. The situation was in a large cranberry marsh, and the nest was fastened to the tops of the long marsh-grass, the bottom resting on, or just reaching, the water. It was composed entirely of marsh-grass. Mr. Trombley says: 'From the size and appearance of both the bird and eggs the evidence is fairly conclusive, although it is not absolutely certain that the bird was a Yellow Rail.'"

An unpublished record for the State is that of Mr. Arthur G. Baumgartel of Grand Rapids, Michigan. He has lately written me in regard to the notes referred to as follows: "I have your letters of the 2nd inst. with reference to the occurrence of the Yellow Rail in Michigan. The pair of Yellow Rail mentioned was taken by me in 1896 in the marsh north of Holland (Ottawa Co.), Michigan. The male on April 21st and the female on April 28th. These birds are now in the Hope College Museum at Holland, [Michigan]. On one of these dates I took a third specimen but it fell in a very boggy place and my young dog, in his hurry to retrieve, jumped on the bird, sinking it into the mud beyond recovery."

In the collection of Mr. Percy A. Taverner of Highland Park, Michigan, is the skin of "a female that was caught alive by a dog on March 25, 1908, north of and just beyond the city (Detroit) limits. Another bird of the same kind was said to have been flushed immediately afterwards but could not be secured. The one taken was presented to me, I endeavored to keep it alive but without success." (Taverner, 1908, p. 327.)

My only experience with this species is as follows: On the morning of Sept. 30, 1908, an adult male in fine plumage was found alive near the Museum, on the University of Michigan campus. When first seen the bird was running about in a bewildered way, and when approached flew away a few feet, but was easily captured.



It was taken to the Zoölogical Department, and in the afternoon was brought alive to the Museum. The bird was very quiet and did not seem to be afraid even when stroked with the hand; it walked quietly about in the shallow box in which it was confined, but was rather droopy. I gave it water in a shallow dish and after I had immersed the bill it raised its head and swallowed; it then drank of its own accord, first dipping its bill in the water, then raising it up in the same manner that a chicken does. The water seemed to revive it, and it appeared to feel quite natural, walking about and pecking at the bottom of the case. It was later fed with small pieces of raw beef which were placed in its bill, but while it swallowed some of these it was not able to pick up food, as the head was injured and the mandibles would not meet. The right eye was also injured, and could not be opened. The bird stepped into the dish of water and acted as though it wished to bathe, but the dish was too small, and I removed it as I did not wish the bird's plumage wet. It was too late and dark to take a photograph, so we waited until about 10 o'clock the following morning, when I placed the bird on a ground nest of the Black-crowned Night Heron and had it photographed. The bird was not as strong as on the evening before and could not stand erect. The bird was in a sitting position with its plumage raised, making it look like a ball of feathers. The bird seemed to be suffering from its injuries and was chloroformed. On skinning it I found a deep cut on the breast, and another across the right eye and side of the head. These injuries were probably caused by the bird striking against wires or buildings while passing through the campus on its migration.

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## SOME BIRDS OF BAKER COUNTY, OREGON.

BY STANLEY G. JEWETT.

THE following list of birds was made during a stay in Baker County between March 10 and August 17, 1906, and May 1 to June 2, 1907. Some interesting species were described to the author by hunters and prospectors, but they have been omitted, as no accurate data were secured. Some species, as the Franklin's Grouse and McFarlane's Screech Owl, are residents in adjoining counties.

The section treated in this list is about fifty miles northeast of Baker City in the Powder River Mountains.

The timber consists largely of yellow and black pine, red and white fir, tamarack and spruce. The open dry hillsides are covered with mountain laurel, while in the vicinity of water are to be found cottonwood and willow.

In the identification of many species the author desires to thank Mr. A. W. Anthony of Portland, Oregon; also the United States National Museum for identifying some of the more doubtful species.

1. **Mergus americanus.** AMERICAN MERGANSER.—A pair was seen flying up the creek on March 27.
2. **Actitis macularia.** SPOTTED SANDPIPER.—Seen several times during the summer.
3. **Dendragapus richardsonii.** RICHARDSON'S GROUSE.—Abundant resident; nests in April and May.



Wood, Norman Asa. 1909. "Notes on the Occurrence of the Yellow Rail in Michigan." *The Auk* 26, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4070467>.

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