



Yellow Rail. Drawing by Brian K. Willis.

Yellow Rail at Montrose Harbor, Chicago

On 22 May 1993 I rode my bicycle to Montrose Beach along Chicago's lakefront, Cook County, to bird the area affectionately referred to as the "magic hedge" because it is a migrant bird trap. Bird watchers were lining the hedge when I arrived.

James Landing thought he had seen a Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) at his feet in the grass. Kanea Hirabayashi also saw a rail disappear into the dandelions and grass. Since rails notoriously slink out of sight and this rail seemed to be no exception, I left to search for other birds.

I returned about 40 minutes later to learn that the rail was positively identified by Landing as a Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*). Birders were now encircling the rediscovered rail and taking photographs. I stood behind one of the photographers and saw the feathered object of everyone's attention, a gorgeous Yellow Rail in the dandelions.

The bird was smaller than an American Robin. It had a small yellow bill and a very yellow brown plumage with black stripes on its back. The white wing patches on the secondaries were not conspicuous except when the bird flew. The rail would disappear into

the short grasses by compressing itself like a mouse and then reappear in the dandelions. Some 20 birders saw the rail.

An overzealous birder flushed the rail. It flew into the "magic hedge" and was never seen again.

The 22 May date coincides with the latest Illinois spring sighting, according to H. David Bohlen, author of *Birds of Illinois*. Mlodinow's *Chicago Area Birds* said the species' normal spring departure is the third week in April.

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Late-departing Immature Black-legged Kittiwake

In spring, I regularly bird Waukegan's North Beach on Lake Michigan in Lake County mornings and late afternoons. When I stopped after work 3 June 1993, I spotted a Great Black-backed Gull among a group of about 300 gulls resting on the beach south of the pier.

I left to get my camera to photograph the gull. Upon returning, I scanned the group with my spotting scope, but was unable to find the Great Black-backed