

and 60 small Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) earlier, so I trained my Kowa scope on these two and was surprised to find they were Brant (*B. bernicla*).

The two geese were as small as the Arctic race of the Canada Geese with an all black head, neck, and chest. The bill, eye, and tarsi were also blackish. The head had a coot-like look. I also noticed a couple of white feathers on the neck of one bird. The back was light brownish with grayish edgings giving a scaled appearance. The undertail coverts were white. The tail was black and in later flight the rump showed a white "V." The birds' sides were grayish brown. At certain light angles, both of these Brants showed light orange-brown colored eyes (they glowed), but when seen in profile, the iris looked dark. None of the small race of Canada Geese present gave the same effect.

The two Brant were too light in color to be other than the Eastern race *Branta bernicla hrota*. Both were immature birds. Among the small Canada Geese present with the Brant were two or three with neck collars. I traced the numbers on the collars later and found they were tagged from a breeding population on Baffin Island. This is also in the breeding range of Brant and these two may have traveled with the Canada Geese all the way from Baffin Island.

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Frigatebird Cruises the Mississippi

My husband, Bob, and I were motoring up the Mississippi River at mile 226 on 13 Oct. 1995 about 2:25 p.m. We were at the Golden Eagle Ferry crossing connecting St. Charles County, Missouri with Calhoun County, Illinois. It was sunny. I noticed a large bird to my right. I thought frigatebird, but not here! I told my husband, who was driving the boat to look at the bird and he immediately said it looked like a possible Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*). I went below and got binoculars and we shared them, watching the bird soar for the next 15 minutes. The bird was larger than a Great Blue Heron, but did not have its long legs. It had a white breast and a dark head and body. The bill was hooked. The tail was about 25% of the bird's overall length. The wings were long, about twice the length. Bob and I have vacationed on Sanibel Island, Florida for the last 10 years and we have observed Magnificent Frigatebird there and also in the British Virgin Islands. Bohlen (1989) lists this species as

a very rare vagrant in Illinois. Four reports exist for Illinois. The third record was along the Mississippi River in Alexander County on 19 July 1986.

Literature Cited

Bohlen, H. D. 1989. The Birds of Illinois. Indiana University Press.

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Two September Yellow Rails in Vermilion County

As a lifelong birder and farmer, I have had the opportunity to observe unusual birds at unexpected times and locations. Mowing hay is one farming practice that has afforded me many interesting birding experiences. On the morning of 9 Sept. 1995, I started mowing a 10-acre field of seeded red clover, alfalfa, and volunteer giant foxtail. The dense vegetation was between 1-and-2-feet tall. The field is southwest of Homer in western Vermilion County, nowhere near a marsh or swamp. The nearest drainage ditch is 1.2 miles away. On the second round of the field, a Sora flushed in front of the mower. At about 10 a.m. on the third mowing round, a smaller, yellowish rail with a white wing patch flushed just a few feet ahead of the mower. It was approximately the size of an Eastern Bluebird with a very short tail, a mostly yellowish-brown coloration overall, and white wing patches obvious in flight. It flew no more than 60 feet when it dropped into the uncut hay.

On the fifth round, the same rail darted out of the standing hay directly in front of the tractor and ran a short distance before re-entering the standing hay. By that time, I had stopped the forward motion of the tractor so I wouldn't kill the bird. The rail reappeared at the edge of the uncut hay and stood still. It stayed put for perhaps 30 seconds at a distance of about 15 feet while I was able to observe bill shape, the checkerboard back with brown spots separated by yellowish white, and its general body shape. The bird then ran across the 3- to 4-inch cut hay stubble and beneath the cut hay swaths away from the standing hay. I continued to mow, flushing two more Soras and two Grasshopper Sparrows. When the field was almost completely mowed at about 11 a.m., a second Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) flushed in front of the mower and flew from the bare side of what little hay remained uncut to the opposite side of the standing forage. I continued to mow very slowly to give the bird time to fly.