

The number of annual observations of Yellow Rails in Illinois can usually be counted on the fingers of one hand. While these birds are probably more common than the number of sightings indicate, their secretive nature and habitat requirements greatly limit the chances of seeing one and even then, only for brief moments. My only other observation of a Yellow Rail occurred nearly 10 years ago while mowing alfalfa. I found a freshly killed, flattened Yellow Rail on a township road that bisects our farm. This species is a rare migrant in Illinois which occurs in fall in hayfields and other agricultural areas away from water (Bohlen 1989).

Literature Cited

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

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Mountain Bluebird in La Salle County

On 19 Nov. 1995 David Brenner and Jerry Rosenband discovered a female Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) southwest of the La Salle Nuclear Plant in open farmfield country. The next day early in the morning I rediscovered the bluebird in a small fruit tree nursery adjacent to a farm house and barn complex on E 2300 between N18 and N19 on the east side of the road. The bird

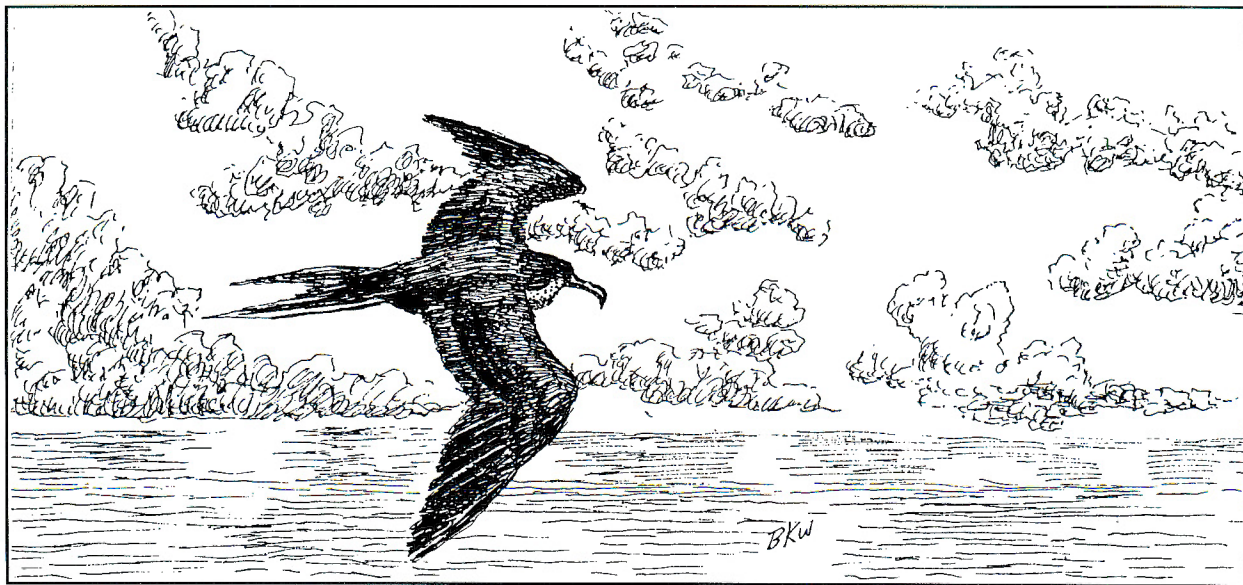
was sitting in a small fruit tree 3 feet off the ground preening. From the fruit tree it flew to the top of a fence post and gradually worked from fence post to fence post dropping to the ground to feed on large caterpillars. At one stage, the bird hovered for a few seconds 10 feet off the ground. In flight the bird appeared long-winged.

The bird had a more horizontal stance than a typical Eastern Bluebird (*S. sialis*). The head, neck, and back were bluish gray. I noted a prominent white eye ring. The flanks and chest were grayish brown. The lower belly and undertail coverts were white. The upper surface of the tail was sky blue. The primaries were sky blue with black edges and tips. When preening, the bird showed white margins on the secondaries. In flight, the tail showed bright sky blue while the upper wings were not quite as bright. The underwing was gray. In bright sunlight, the head had a touch of brown and the back was more gray than blue. The downy breast feathers were dark. The bird had black legs and bill. My approximate viewing time was 30 minutes during clear sunny skies and rather cold and windy conditions. Unfortunately no other birders were able to relocate this bird. This species as a very rare vagrant; only three records have been accepted for the state (Bohlen 1989).

Literature Cited

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

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Frigatebird drawing by Brian K. Willis.