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COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD ☐UNUSUAL RECORD ☒

Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species: LEAST BITTERN Troxobrychus exilis
(Vernacular Name) (Scientific Name)Date(s): June 1, 1983 and June 3, 1983Number of birds seen: One Sex: Male Plumage: AdultLocality: Flatiron Site (near Riverbend Ponds) Fort Collins Elevation: Approx. 4900'Nearest town: Fort Collins, Colorado County: LarimerTime(s) observed: 6:00-7:00AM (6/1/83) and 7:15-11:45AM (6/3/83)Duration of observation (e.g. 1 sec., 5 min., etc.): 15 minutes on 6/1, total of 2-3 hrs. on 6/3/83Other observers who saw the bird with you (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):
Kevin Cook, Fort Collins, 221-0012 Matthew Leatherman (age 7)Michael Schomaker, Fort Collins, 484-8723 Nathan Leatherman (age 5)
Bryan Baldwin (age 12)Other observers who saw the bird independently (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):
Peter Paton (could be reached via Dr. Ryder @ CSU) - See Peter's Sight Record ReportLight conditions (position of bird to light and shade, direction and strength of light):
Various: see from all angles, all light conditions from shade to total sunlight.Optical equipment used (e.g. power, types): 7x35 Bushnell binocularsDistance, and how measured: to within 3 feet, measured in part by focal ring on cameraIf photographed, type of equipment and film: Minolta 35 mm with 100-300 zoom telephoto (KR 64)Who else photographed the bird? Kevin CookDescribe the bird's behavior (e.g. flying, feeding, or habits used in identifying):
Bird was initially seen on both days as it flushed from cattail/willow pond margin. Flight was usually for short distance (20-30 yards). Bird was observed perched in Plains cottonwoods, narrowleaf cottonwoods, willows, Russian olive, as well as cattails. On occasion it flushed readily, at other times it allowed very close, lengthy observation. It never went into the typical bittern "freezing" pose with bill pointed vertically, but it did elevate bill up to 45 degrees above horizontal. Once was observed catching small fish or tadpole.Describe in detail the bird's relative size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern.
Include details of bill, wing and tail shape. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions and illustrations is not enough. Describe only what you actually observe in the field:

Bird had overall heron shape and was very slender. Size was about like that of a Virginia Rail. Overall color underneath was light with a rusty wash and faint striping. Back was very dark, with suggestions of both dark bluish or greenish, depending on the light. Bill was tannish-yellow. Eye: yellow with dark pupil. Legs were yellowish. Upper margin from side view of wing was dark, with white patch at front of wing. Top of head was dark. Large rusty-tan patches in wing in flight. On a number of occasions the bird stood in cattails or willows, one leg grasping one stem, the other leg the other stem. Often the stems were grasped at

Description (continued):

differing heights above the water giving the bird an appearance of being off-balance. Often the bird waited until the last moment to flush. It tended to try and hide behind a tree trunk or branches when being approached. Occasionally it walked away by stalking through the reeds. Once it walked into dense, dried patch of grass and hid. Twice at very close range and when it appeared ready to fly or flee, it would open its beak a few inches without making any sound.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery, (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):

No call heard, except for an occasional, short cackle.

Describe the general and specific habitat in which you observed the bird:

Flooded gravel pit, with extensive border of cattails. Many volunteer tree saplings of the species previously described. Poudre River runs approximately 1/8 mile to the west. How did you eliminate similarly appearing species?

American bittern - (also found in the area on a regular basis) much larger, striped, black mark on neck, constantly calling in the area
Virginia rail - (also found in the area on regular basis) - no light patches in wing, red bill at this time of year, bill narrower and slightly curved.
Green heron - (has been found on occasion in the area) - overall dark appearance, larger, usually crows during flight, esp. right after being flushed.
What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species?

I have seen least bitterns in Ohio and North Carolina, probably a total of 5 birds. The last time I saw a least bittern was in 1973.

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

The following references confirmed what I was certain I had seen in the field.

a) at time of observation:

None

b) after observation: Both Eastern and Western editions of Peterson Field Guides, Singer Field Guide, Audubon Field Guide, Audubon Water Bird Guide (Pough), and painting by F. Lans-

This report was written from reports made during x, after observation x from memory x downe.
Date and time report was written: 6/7/83

Reporting observer: Dave Leatherman Signature: Dave Leatherman

Address: 2602 Countryside Court, Fort Collins, CO 80524 (484-5445)

All reports will be maintained permanently at the address below:

Return to: CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
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