

SHORT NOTE

First documented record of watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) in Oceania

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The watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) breeds from Pakistan, India, and the Maldives east to China, Korea, Japan (Yaeyama Is), the Russian Far East (Primorskiy Territory, Bol'shoy Pelis I), the Philippines, and Greater Sunda Is (Brazil 1991; Mackinnon & Phillipps 1993; Taylor 1996; Coates & Bishop 1997; Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Smythies & Davison 1999; Strange 2001; Shimba 2007; Mann 2008; Nechaev & Gamova 2009). Birds from the northern part of the range regularly migrate to as far south as the Lesser Sundas, (Mackinnon & Phillipps 1993, 2000; Taylor 1996; Taylor & van Perlo 1998; Strange 2001). A few, probably overshooting their wintering destination, have been recorded in Australian Indian Ocean Territory, including several observed on Christmas I since 1972 and one captured and released at Cocos (Keeling) Is in Dec 2005 (Chongkin *et al.* 2009). The watercock is vagrant on the Arabian Peninsula in Oman (Porter *et al.* 1996), and in the Russian Far East as far north as the Kamchatka Peninsula and Commander I (Artuchin *et al.* 2000; Nechaev & Gamova 2009; Gerasimov, *pers. comm.*).

On 1 May 2010, G. McKinlay visited Kosrae I, Micronesia, and photographed a bird he identified as a watercock (Fig. 1). This is the first documented record of the watercock in Oceania (including the islands of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia).

Pratt *et al.* (1987) listed this species as hypothetical in Palau, based on an unconfirmed sighting by R. P. Owen that was mentioned in correspondence from Owen to Pratt.

Kosrae (5°19'N, 162°59'E; 109 km²; 630 m elevation) is the easternmost island in the Caroline Is and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), in the west-central Pacific Ocean (Fig. 2). The watercock was found in a grassy field just outside Utwe village at the south end of the island. McKinlay saw it initially the morning of 1 May, once again during late afternoon (presumably the same bird), and once again during mid-afternoon on 2 May before he left the island the following day. The field was bordered on 2 sides by a brackish tidal area dominated by mangroves and nypa palms (*Nypa fruticans*) and the nearest houses were ~100 m away and out of sight behind dense vegetation. The bird was observed turning small clumps of dried grass cuttings as it foraged in the field, but no prey items were identified. It did not vocalize and was never observed flying. It was generally unperturbed by people quietly walking by, but it ran into taller grasses when more boisterous groups were present, and emerged to continue feeding when they passed. The bird approached to within 8-10 m of McKinlay as he observed it from a car parked on the gravel road immediately adjacent to the field. In coloration and pattern of its plumage, the bird resembled either a female, nonbreeding male, or a juvenile, but the pinkish-orange coloration at the base of the bill

Received 15 Jun 2010; accepted 28 Jul 2010

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Fig. 1. Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) on Kosrae, Federated States of Micronesia on 1 May 2010.

and frontal shield was more suggestive of a male.

The arrival time and source of the watercock on Kosrae bird are uncertain. Kosraens with some knowledge of the island's fauna were unfamiliar with this species when shown photographs and queried by McKinlay. The nearest breeding populations of the watercock are in the Philippines, ~ 4000 km to the west, and the nearest migrants are those recorded (albeit rarely) in the Izu and Iwo Is of southern Japan, about 3100 km to the northwest. Interestingly, Buden & Retogral (2010) reported on the recent expansion of another rallid, the white-breasted waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), into Micronesia. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the watercock on Kosrae is anything other than a long distance vagrant that has traveled at least 3,000 km, and probably much farther, from its point of origin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Walter Boles, Ian McAllan, Kiyooki Ozaki, Alison Pirie, and Jeremiah Trimble for assistance with the literature search and are especially grateful to Yuri Gerasimov and Vladimir Loskot for English translations of records from the Russian Far East. We also thank Carlo Custodio and Philip Round for comments regarding the identification, age, and sex of the specimen photographed on Kosrae.

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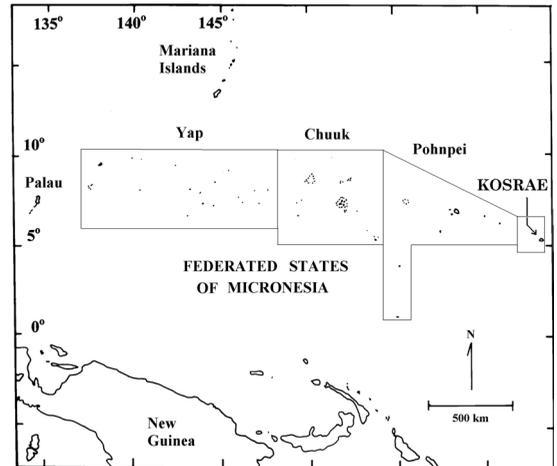


Fig. 2. Location of Kosrae and adjacent islands in the west central Pacific Ocean.

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Keywords Watercock; *Gallicrex cinerea*; Kosrae; Micronesia; Oceania