

Yellow Rail *Coturnicops noveboracensis*



Folk Name: Yellow Crane, Clicker

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Accidental

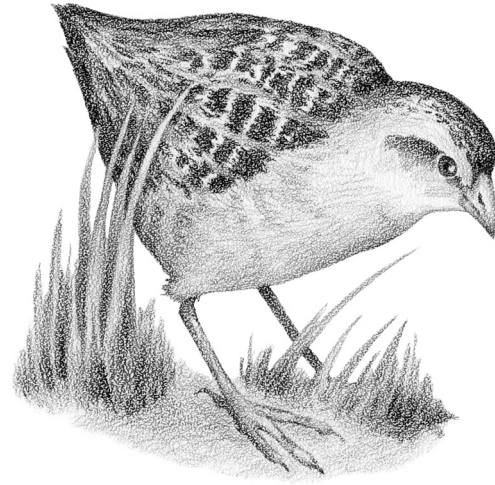
Habitat: Wet grassy areas, fields

The Yellow Rail is arguably the hardest bird to find in the Carolinas. Many very experienced birders consider this species as their “nemesis bird,” a bird that has eluded them repeatedly, despite countless searches in appropriate habitat and during the proper season. This tiny rail is only 7 ¼ inches long, about 1 ½ inches smaller than a Northern Cardinal. The Yellow Rail is primarily found along the coast during the winter in wet fields with thick, short grass or in very shallow freshwater marshes. Birders will often play a recording of this bird’s *tick-tick-tick* call, or will tap two pebbles together in an attempt to imitate it in hopes of eliciting a response. However, Yellow Rails seldom, if ever, respond vocally to recorded calls here in winter, but there are reports of rails responding to the call by moving in and wandering about in the marsh grass at the caller’s feet.

About 130 years ago, the presence of Yellow Rail in the Central Carolinas was confirmed in Chester County. Leverett Loomis shot a female Yellow Rail on November 12, 1887, a male on 23 November, and he saw another on 10 December of that year. Three years later, he found a fourth Yellow Rail, this time in the month of October.

In addition to these specimen records, we have one sight record for Mecklenburg County and one bird photographed in Rutherford County. Taylor Piephoff and Heathy Walker reported a Yellow Rail in Charlotte on October 3, 1995. Piephoff later provided this account of their discovery:

[We were visiting] the Irwin Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant to look for rare shorebirds on the sludge drying beds. After checking the extensive sludge compartments, we walked over to a damp grassy depression to see what might be hiding out in the thick vegetation. Almost immediately a tiny rail flushed from our feet, flew weakly for a few yards,



then dropped back down. Both of us immediately yelled “Yellow Rail!” as we both had picked up on the prominent white wing patches when the bird jumped. Despite efforts to re-locate the bird we were not able to induce the rail to flush again.

This sight record was reviewed by the Mecklenburg County Bird Records Committee meeting held on September 1, 1998, and was found acceptable based upon the details provided and the experience of the observers who submitted the report. The committee made the decision to include this species on the Mecklenburg County bird checklist.

One additional report of a Yellow Rail on the periphery of the region is of a “tired” bird picked up in a mowed hayfield in Rutherford County on April 28, 2006. This Yellow Rail was photographed by Jim Petranka and was later released.

The Yellow Rail is listed on the Red Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a “species with extremely high vulnerability” to extinction. It is in need of immediate and significant conservation action.