

## Clapper Rail *Rallus crepitans*



**Folk Name:** Marsh Hen, Big Marsh Hen

**Status:** Migrant

**Abundance:** Very rare

**Habitat:** Marshes

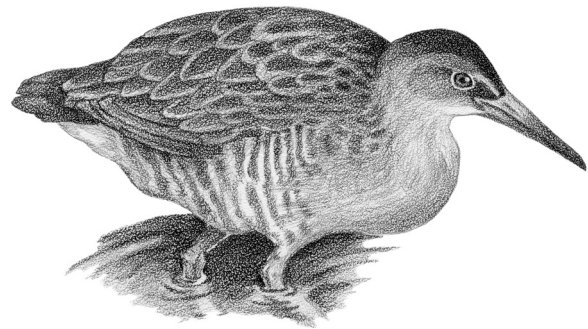
*Note: Recent genetic studies by avian taxonomists have provided evidence that the Clapper Rail and the King Rail are possibly variants of the same species.*

The Clapper Rail is a bird found in coastal saltmarshes in the tidal zone. There are many subspecies with various color differences across its range. The Clapper Rail is known to be a nocturnal migrant that moves to and from marshes in the northern United States to areas along the southeastern coast. This large rail (14 ½ inches) has been periodically found inland in North Carolina usually “as victims of collisions with TV towers or other tall structures.”

We have six reports of the Clapper Rail occurring in the region. In September 1958, James H. Carson sighted the first Clapper Rail ever reported visiting Mecklenburg County. Carson’s record was published in the second edition of the Mecklenburg County bird checklist in 1965. The remainder of our records are of birds examined in hand and photographed.

A Clapper Rail was found dead near a high-rise building in downtown Charlotte on April 8, 2004. The remains were collected and turned over to staff at the MCPRD for identification. The bird was photographed, but the specimen was too far gone to retain as a voucher specimen. The coloring of this bird, gray cheeks and lightly barred flanks with no cinnamon below, suggested it was from the Atlantic subspecies as opposed to a Gulf Coast subspecies.

A local wildlife rehabilitator received a weak, but otherwise uninjured, Clapper Rail, on September 17, 2011. The following year, she treated two. An injured adult arrived for medical treatment in July 2012. The bird was successfully treated and released near the coast. A second Clapper Rail, a juvenile found in the Lake Wylie area on September 20, 2012, had been shot. Taylor Piephoff shared this thought about these Charlotte rails: “Inland Clapper Rail records are not unprecedented but



are mysterious. No one knows where these individuals of this strictly coastal species come from. Are they from the east coast population from points north, east, or southeast or from the Gulf Coast populations?” This is a good question and no one will ever know without future studies using banding, satellite tracking, or DNA testing.

Our most recent report is of a Clapper Rail that flew into the window of a PetSmart store in Hickory on September 5, 2016. The bird was photographed and sent to Dwayne Martin for confirmation of its identification. This is the only record of this species in Catawba County.



*Clapper Rail found dead in downtown Charlotte. (Donald W. Serif)*