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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Clapper Rail *Rallus longirostris*

Rails are naturally secretive in their habits, and the Clapper Rail is no exception. As a result, it is far more often heard than seen. The Clapper Rail resides and breeds along both coasts and the Gulf of Mexico, from central California south to Baja California and from Connecticut south to the Bahamas.

Habitat. The Clapper Rail is found throughout Florida's coastal marshes and mangrove swamps. During periods of low tide, Clapper Rails venture onto exposed mudflats to hunt for insects, small crabs, and mollusks (Longstreet 1969). This habit makes the Clapper Rail possibly the most visible member of the rails.

The nest of the Clapper Rail is built in the higher areas of tidal salt marshes or in tall cordgrass to prevent inundation during high tides. It is constructed of a platform of marsh grasses, and the surrounding vegetation is arched over the nest to form a protective canopy. The cup of the nest is well defined and formed of grass and other fine plant materials (Harrison 1975). Two atypical Clapper Rail nests were located by D. J. Nicholson in Volusia County in July 1926. They were built in lower branches of small mangroves (Howell 1932). Nesting activities begin in March and extend to July (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Clutch size normally comprises 8 to 11 eggs that are creamy-white and lightly marked with dark brown. Incubation is performed by both sexes and lasts 20 to 24 days. The precocial young are attended by both parents and usually leave the nest soon after hatching (Harrison 1978). They are capable of flight at 63 to 70 days. Two broods may be raised each season.

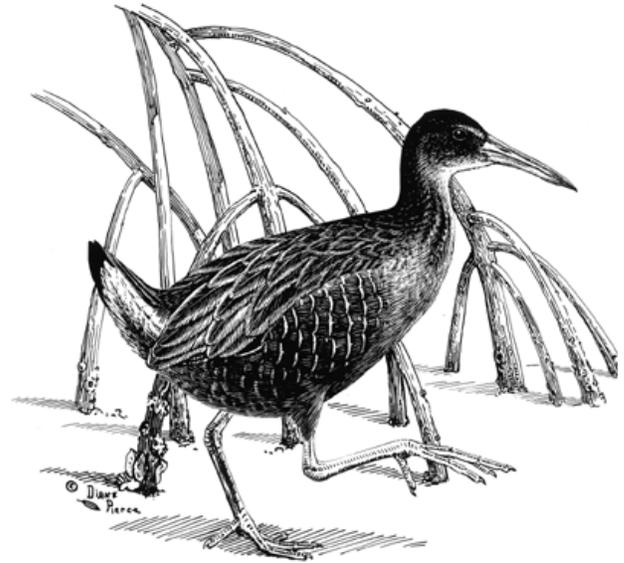


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Seasonal Occurrence. The Clapper Rail is a permanent resident in Florida, although in winter, birds that breed farther north augment the population. During migration, Clapper Rails have been found in April and again in October and November. Egg dates range from 25 March through 25 July.

Status. The Clapper Rail is restricted to the coasts, and the accompanying range map shows that it is widespread throughout the state's tidal marshes. Birds were recorded in all coastal counties but 3: Martin, Collier, and Palm Beach counties. Three subspecies breed in the state: *R. l. scotti* along the entire Gulf coast, in Florida Bay, and up the Atlantic coast to Indian River County (H. Kale, pers. commun.); *R. l. waynei* on the Atlantic Coast from Nassau County south to Merritt Island; and *R. l. insularum* in the Keys (Stevenson 1976). Some Atlas records from St. Lucie and Indian River counties may represent apparent intergrades between *scotti* and *waynei* (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

The birds are hesitant to abandon the security provided by the *Juncus* and *Spartina* marshes they inhabit, and are more easily located by listening for their loud "kek-kek-kek" call notes. The use of a tape player broadcast their calls (or those of King Rails) over the marsh will usually elicit the desired response from unseen Clapper Rails. It is in this manner that Clapper Rails are most efficiently surveyed.

Greg Bretz

Clapper Rail

