

This resource is based on the following source:

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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King Rail *Rallus elegans*

The King Rail, the largest rail in North America, is found across the eastern half of North America, from the Atlantic coast to the Great Plains and from the Gulf of Mexico to southern Canada. Its plumage is distinctively rust-colored, unlike the grayish or brownish Clapper Rail.

Habitat. King Rails breed in freshwater marshes in Florida. Their diet consists of aquatic insects, slugs, crayfish, tadpoles, frogs, small fish, and marsh vegetation (Howell 1932). The nest is a well-hidden mound of cattails or rushes, lined with grass and placed on the ground or in vegetation. Surrounding plants are bent over the nest to form a canopy (Harrison 1978). A clutch consists of 10 to 12 pale buff eggs that are spotted with brown. Incubation lasts 21 to 23 days and is performed by both adults. The black downy chicks, which leave the nest shortly after hatching, are capable of flight at 63 days of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

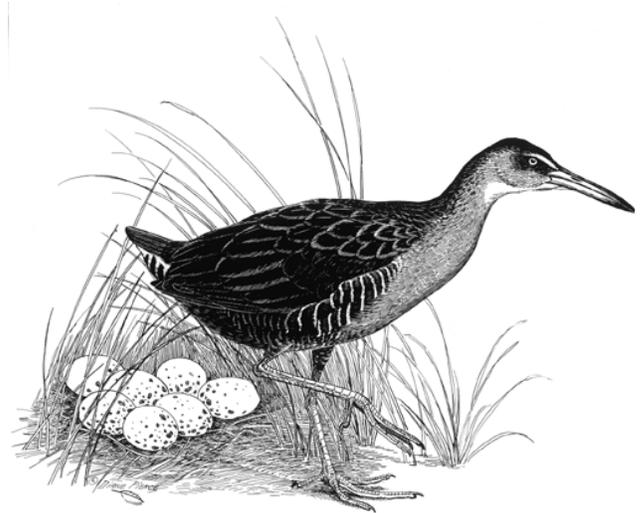


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Seasonal Occurrence. Eggs are laid as early as January (Kale and Maehr 1990), but most are laid between February and June. Migrating King Rails have been found between April and May and in September and October.

Status. The King Rail is an uncommon resident of Florida's freshwater marshes. The Atlas map shows that this bird occurs in all regions of the state, excluding the Keys, but is much more widespread in the central and southern peninsula, especially in the St. Johns River marshes and the Everglades. Because of its secretive nature and the inaccessibility of its breeding habitats, the King Rail was underreported during the Atlas project probably more than any other species. Fortunately, it is a rather vocal bird and can be coaxed into responding taped rail calls, allowing detection even while remaining hidden.

Greg Bretz

King Rail

