

King Rail (*Rallus elegans*)

Pennsylvania Endangered Bird Species

State Rank: S1B (critically imperiled), Global Rank: G4 (apparently secure)

Identification

The king rail is so named because of its large size and bright coloration. This plump chicken-sized bird is a bright rusty color. They range in size from 15 to 19 inches in height and have 21- to 25-inch wingspans. Males are larger than females. Bills are long, slightly decurved and yellow with brown tips. These birds are extremely secretive and would rather run than fly to escape detection. They are rarely seen, therefore, and are most often located by their loud calls, a resonant grunting bup-bup, bup, bup, more rapid at the end.

Biology-Natural History

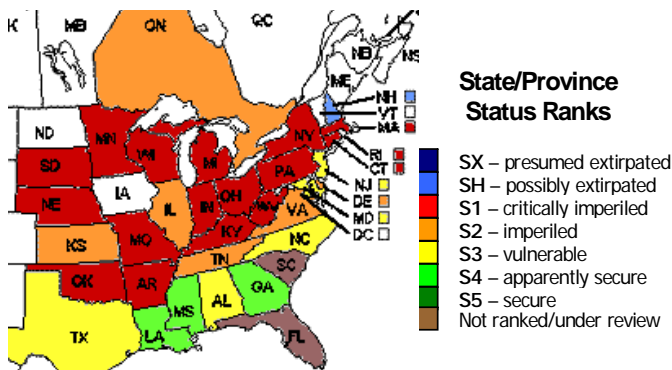
King rail nests are platforms up to 9 inches in diameter, 6 to 18 inches above the water. They are built of grasses, sedges and cattails in shallow water marshes and roadside ditches. From 6 to 15 pale, slightly spotted brown eggs are laid in a shallow depression of the nest. Overhead cover is often pulled over the nest. Young are able to fly about 60 days after hatching. Wading in shallow water, king rails feed on crustaceans, small fish, frogs and insects. In winter, food items consist of grains - particularly rice - and berries.



Photo Credit: Rob Criswell

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe (August 2007)



Habitat

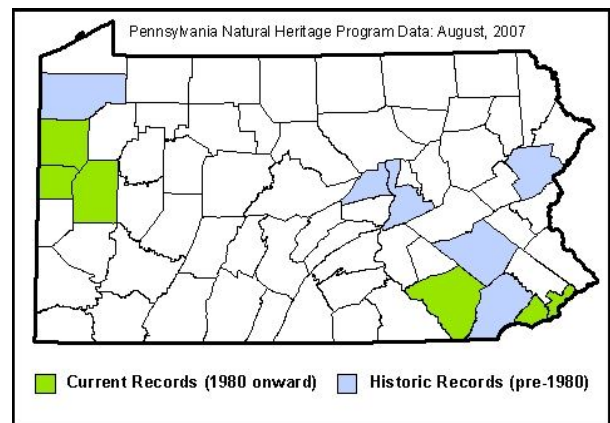
This rail lives in freshwater and brackish marshes and roadside ditches in eastern North America, primarily along the Atlantic coast. It is a very rare breeder in the few larger marshes remaining in Pennsylvania.

Reasons for Being Endangered

King rails were never common in Pennsylvania, but annual reports indicate the bird today is much less abundant than historically. This apparent decline is considered to be due primarily to losses of marshland habitat.

Management Practices

As with many other endangered and threatened species, the king rail needs wetlands in order to exist. Maintaining stable water levels during the summer will enhance the species' breeding success here.



References:

- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: August 21, 2007).



Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

Fact Sheet adapted from: Felbaum, Mitchell, et al. Endangered and Threatened Species of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, PA: Wild Resource Conservation Fund, 1995.

