

Secretive Marsh bird Surveys

The marsh bird surveys can be conducted by block owners themselves but if these owners are not interested or able to run the special surveys, then regional coordinators can recruit or designate one or more other volunteers to conduct them. So, be sure to let your regional coordinator know if you are ready, willing, and able to volunteer to do one or more marsh bird surveys for the Atlas. Importantly, although our goal is to conduct these surveys in every priority block in the state, they also can be conducted by willing volunteers in *any* atlas block in the state.

When you know what block(s) you will be conducting a survey in, the next step is to print a customized block map. You can access this site by following the link to the mapping tool from www.MNbirdatlas.org.

CHOOSING YOUR SURVEY LOCATIONS

Choose the survey location(s) that looks like it has habitat components preferred by one or more marsh bird species. We want to maximize the chance of detecting marsh birds if they actually do occur in an atlas block, so feel free to choose the very best looking wetlands in your block, as well as the most promising looking points from which to conduct the survey.

When you conduct the surveys please either record the GPS coordinates for the survey point locations and record it clearly on the data sheet **or** mark the survey spot carefully on a your block map.

WHEN TO CONDUCT MARSH BIRD SURVEYS

Surveys should be conducted between May 1st and June 15th. Surveys should be done either in the morning or the evening, which is when marsh birds are most detectable. Vocalizations usually peak in the hour surrounding sunrise and sunset. Morning surveys can be conducted anytime in the period from first light (30-45 minutes before sunrise) to 3 hours after sunrise. Evening surveys should be conducted in the period from 3 hours before sunset to dark (30-45 minutes after sunset).

Marsh birds of Special Conservation Interest

The Least Bittern and Yellow Rail are Species of Special Conservation Interest for the Atlas so please try to obtain as exact location as possible for these species, as well as the highest breeding code you can (this may require several visits).

Marsh birds requiring Verification Forms

The King Rail and Black Rail are two species that are uncommon enough that should you encounter these in the field, and we hope you do, please fill out a Verification Form and let your Regional or Project Coordinator know.

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SURVEY

Take time to familiarize yourself as much as possible with the various vocalizations of all wetland birds likely to be encountered, as well as calls or other vocalizations of non-target species of interest, such as Alder and Willow Flycatcher, Sedge and Marsh Wren, American Woodcock, and Wilson's Snipe. There are many good commercial sources and internet resources for reviewing marsh bird vocalizations.

DON'T JUST LISTEN—LOOK, TOO!

Conducting surveys can be tricky. Marsh birds are elusive and quiet most of the time. They are often difficult to see because they usually remain hidden among the dense growing vegetation. Marsh birds often approach a sound or invader in their territory without vocalizing. They may walk a considerable distance before vocalizing. Watch for any movement in or of the vegetation. It is helpful to quietly pivot around to allow observations in all directions. Because marsh birds are quiet much of the time, this requires the successful observer to be patient. Avoid making noises or moving around very much. Patience and persistence are keys to success.

ACCEPTABLE SURVEY CONDITIONS

Marsh bird surveys should be run under satisfactory weather conditions. Avoid rainy, very windy, or very cold (below freezing) conditions. Occasional light drizzle or mist may not affect marsh bird response. However, steady drizzle or fog should be avoided.

SPECIES	HABITAT	CALL DESCRIPTION AND MNEMONIC	
Sora	Likes dense vegetation in a variety of wetlands with some open water		<i>whinny, per-weep, keep</i>
Virginia Rail	Variety of wetlands with emergents interspersed with open water or mudflats	A Metallic <i>kid-ick</i> or a descending series of quacks (grunt)	<i>grunt, tick-it, kicker (tic-tic-tic-mcgreer)</i>
Least Bittern	Wetlands with dense vegetation and some open water; woody vegetation may be present	Usually four identical soft <i>coos</i>	
American Bittern	Marshes with tall emergent vegetation	A crooking or "pumping" sound <i>oonck-a-tsoonck</i>	<i>pump-er-lunk</i>
Pied-billed Grebe	Deeper wetlands with open water with emergent vegetation	3-part call starting low and increasing in speed and volume	<i>owwhoop, heyena or donkey bray</i>
American Coot	Open water on large marshes or sewage ponds, with areas bordered by emergent vegetation	rough notes <i>puhk-kuh-kuk.</i> or <i>puhk-ut.</i>	
Common Moorhen	Large marshes, open water and sometimes slow moving rivers bordered by emergent vegetation	Varied, often loud, harsh calls	<i>wipeout, giddyup, beep</i>
Wilson's Snipe	Marshes, ponds, wet meadows, or flooded fields	A <i>winnowing</i> noise or a low, rasping <i>kzrrt</i>	
Yellow Rail	Wet meadows, sedges	Sounds like two pebbles clacking together	<i>click-click-click</i>
King Rail	Marshes with large expanses of emergent vegetation.	Musical ticks-: <i>chac-chac.</i> And <i>kik-kik-kik</i>	
Black Rail	Wet meadows and edges of marshes	<i>kickee-doo, grr-grr-grr</i>	<i>kickee-doo, grr-grr-grr</i>