



## Yellow rail

*Coturnicops noveboracensis*

**Family - Rallidae**

**State Status:**

Special Concern

**Global Rank:**

G4

**Reason for Rarity:**

The loss of grassy wetlands to development, the degradation of coastal marshes, and the difficulty of monitoring Yellow Rail populations all contribute to its rarity and little understood distribution in Maine.

**Threats:**

Loss of sedge meadows and other wet meadow habitats as a result of filling, ditching, and establishment of invasive species.

**Conservation Considerations:**

Conservation measures should focus on habitat management and preservation. Conservation easements, controlled burns, water level management, and restricted human access to breeding sites can all be effective tools for managing land to benefit Yellow Rail

**Habitat**

The Yellow Rail inhabits damp meadows and marshes with abundant grasses and sedges often within stream floodplains. This rail prefers a mixture of new growth and dry, dead grasses that form mats and overhanging cover. Standing water over a foot deep, and areas with small trees are avoided. Wintering birds and birds migrating in the fall often use mature salt marshes, well above the waterline. They can also be found in rice fields.

**Range:**

The Yellow Rail breeds from southern Northwest Territories and Alberta east to southern Quebec and New Brunswick and south to northern Maine, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and northeastern Montana. The bird's wintering grounds extend from

**State Distribution:**

The Yellow Rail has been detected in Hancock, Washington, Penobscot, n. Somerset, and n. Piscataquis counties. Individuals have been heard calling during the breeding season, but nesting has never been confirmed.

**Global Distribution:** G4**General Description:**

The yellow rail is most often seen in flight, identified by its warm yellow chin and chest, yellow bill, yellow and black stripes on the upper parts, and flashes of white in the upper and under wings. A rare good look reveals a dark cap over yellowish eyebrows and a dark brown mask. Yellow rails are only slightly larger than sparrows, growing to about 7.25 inches. They weigh 1.8 ounces, with a wingspan of 11 inches. The sexes are similar. Few observers ever see a Yellow Rail on the ground, even when the male's "song," a tic-tic tictictic, announces its close presence.

**Phenology:**

Much of the yellow rail's breeding biology has not yet been observed. This marsh bird arrives on its breeding grounds from late April through mid-May. Males establish large territories by continuous singing, and parading with raised wings to flash their white wing patches. Monogamous pairs may preen each other as part of their courtship. Both sexes construct a woven nest of grasses and sedges, which the female finishes and conceals with a canopy of vegetation. She lays 5-10 eggs and incubates them for about 23 days. Within a day of hatching, yellow rail chicks can walk, but require feeding and brooding for up to three weeks. The female makes a low "ror" call when disturbed at the nest, and calls chicks with a soft whinny. Juveniles can fly at 35 days, but little is known about their natural history. It is uncertain whether or not yellow rails breed in Maine. Birds have only been detected early in the breeding season, and nesting has never been confirmed. Yellow

rails do call during the migration period, thus the birds detected in Maine may have all been migrant birds. Yellow rails have also been observed in Maine during fall migration as early as mid-September and as late as mid-November, and in some years in greater numbers than usual.