

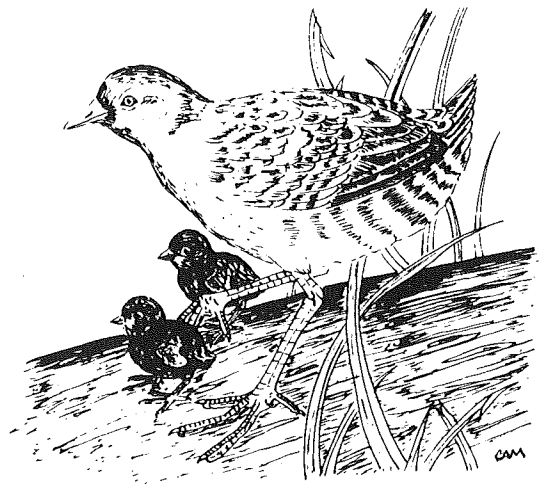
Sora

Porzana carolina

The Sora, with its stubby yellow bill and erect, constantly twitching tail, reminds one of an errant bantam hen. Although considered the most common rail in North America (Pough 1951), it proved to be one of the most difficult members of its family to find in Vermont. Located in only 10 Atlas Project priority blocks statewide, the Sora appeared to be primarily restricted to Vermont's larger marshes, namely those at West Rutland, Lake Memphremagog, and along Lake Champlain. No Soras were recorded in the Connecticut River valley, although suitable habitat exists there. Unless an observer is in excellent habitat, the chances of hearing, much less seeing, a Sora without using tape recordings of its call are slim indeed. Because Vermont does not offer the large inaccessible wetlands that make excellent rail habitat, it is perhaps not surprising that few Soras were lured into view by Atlas Project workers. However, the Virginia Rail was encountered three times more often than the Sora in priority blocks, a fact probably related to the former's acceptance of smaller marshes.

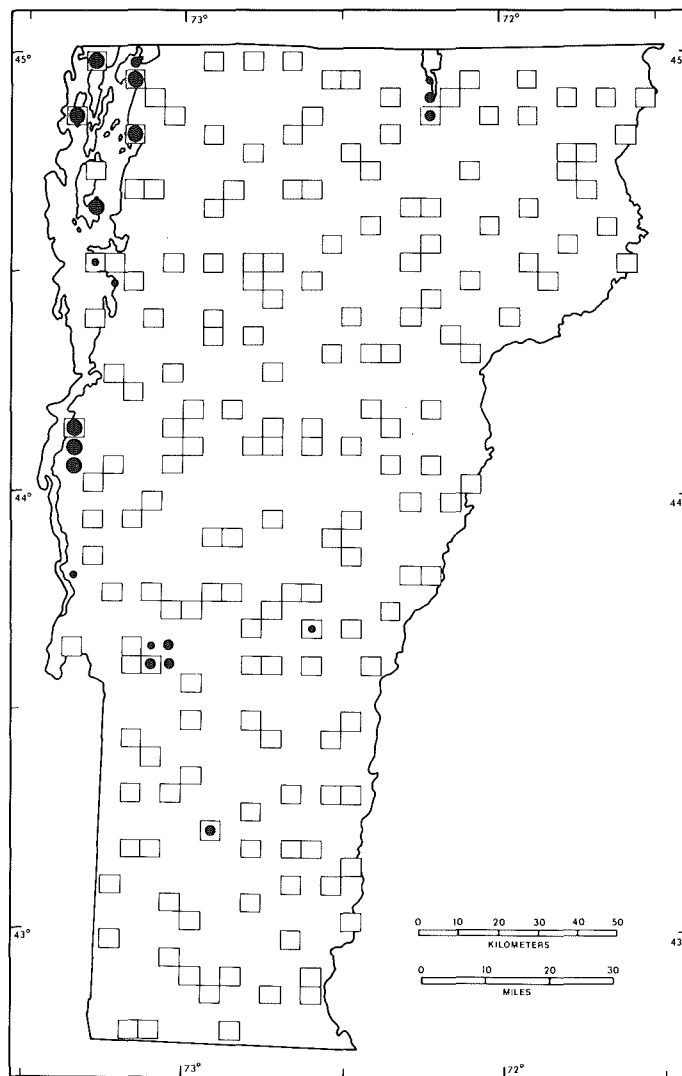
The status of the Sora is not known to have changed significantly since Vermont was settled. Habitat loss has been minimal, as relatively little drainage of the state's wetlands has occurred. Though classified as a gamebird, few if any Soras are harvested annually. Griscom and Snyder (1955) and Bull (1974) considered it a declining species in Massachusetts and New York; no reasons for the decline are apparent.

Those who have succeeded in flushing a Sora and have watched its short labored flight just above the marsh vegetation may be amazed to learn that it is a strong migrant, regularly crossing the Caribbean Sea, and that it has been recorded as far south as Peru (Terres 1980). Perhaps because it undertakes a longer migration, the Sora returns to Vermont slightly later than the Virginia Rail, generally announcing its arrival with *ker-wee* and *whinny* calls during



the last week of April. Nesting commences about 2½ weeks after the first birds return (Pospichal 1952). Although researchers in other areas have reported nest densities as high as 35 nests per 43 ha (107 a) (Tanner and Hendrickson 1956), Vermont densities even in prime habitats such as the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area are assumed to be considerably lower. In the absence of an intensive survey of these localized breeding areas, however, any estimate is speculative.

Soras prefer to nest in wet marshes, placing their nests above water 10–15 cm (6–10 in) deep (Walkinshaw 1940). Nesting apparently commences in mid May in Vermont. All three Vermont clutch dates are between May 27 and 31. The nest is placed in sedges, bushes, or cattails about 15 cm (6 in) above the water. It is constructed of surrounding vegetation, and, unlike the Virginia Rail's, is usually lined with fine plant material (Walkinshaw 1940). The female begins her clutch before the nest is completed, and incubation usually commences when the clutch is only half completed. A dome constructed of overhanging vegetation and an entry ramp are frequently added as laying progresses. Even partly submerged eggs have reportedly hatched (Gibbs 1899). A full clutch may consist of 6 to 18 (usually 8 to 11) buff, irregularly spotted eggs. Soras are apparently more shy around the nest



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 10 (6%)

Possible breeding: 2 (20% of total)

Probable breeding: 3 (30% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 5 (50% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	6	19	60
Green Mountains	1	2	10
North Central	1	5	10
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	1	6	10
Eastern Foothills	1	4	10

than are Virginia Rails (Gillette 1897; Mousley 1937). Both members of the pair share in incubating and caring for the young. Incubation may take 11 to 22 days; the average is 19, depending on clutch size (Walkinshaw 1940, 1957; Pospichal 1952). Since hatching takes place over several days, the pair frequently share responsibilities, one member brooding the jet black, precocial young while the other continues to incubate. Walkinshaw (1940) and Pospichal (1952) believed that posthatching Soras remain more closely associated with marshlands during the summer than Virginia Rails—a conclusion supported by local Ver-

mont observations (D. Kibbe, pers. observ.).

Soras eat a wide variety of foods. Seeds, mollusks, insects, and even fish comprise the summer diet (Horak 1970), but seeds may constitute much of the diet during the remainder of year, and especially in the fall when the species congregates in large marshes (Meanley 1960; Webster 1964). Since Soras are relatively quiet except for a brief period in the spring, the fall departure dates are poorly defined for Vermont.

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