

USACE Natural Resource Management

Migratory Birds



Eastern Black Rail

FAST FACTS

REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS: The Eastern Black Rail is one of 4 subspecies of black rails and is state-listed as either endangered or threatened in seven states including Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia. In 2018, the USFWS proposed listing the species as threatened; however, the listing process has not been finalized. The other three subspecies are not listed.

Multiple factors threaten this bird such as habitat loss due to continued alteration and loss of wetland habitat, high density grazing, haying and mowing during the breeding season, and land management practices that result in fire suppression.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: Protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 as well as state level protections, the Eastern Black Rail is a small, secretive marsh bird. Sea level rise, changes in precipitation and rising temperatures are causing the loss of marsh habitat black rails need to survive. Additionally, human impacts, like habitat fragmentation, and the introduction of invasive species also pose conservation challenges.

HABITAT NEEDS: One of four subspecies of black rail, the Eastern Black Rail is broadly distributed, living in salt and freshwater marshes. The USFWS is not proposing critical habitat for the Eastern Black Rail with the listing of the species.

- Habitat can be tidally or non-tidally influenced ranging in salinity from salt to brackish to fresh.
- In the interior U.S., Eastern Black Rails occupy wet sedge meadows with dense cover.
- Along the Gulf Coast, the species can be found in higher elevation wetland zones with some shrubby vegetation.
- In the northeast, the Eastern Black Rail can be found in salt and brackish marshes with dense cover in addition to the upland areas of these marshes. (USFWS)

Height: About the size of a sparrow, the Eastern black rail is four to six inches long with a wingspan of up to 11 inches. (USFWS)

Color: This subspecies is mostly gray to black with a black bill and red eyes. With white spots on their wings, they have some brown feathers on their backs.

Migration: Partially migratory, the Eastern Black Rail winters in the southern part of its breeding range.

Photos: All About Birds (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and USFWS.

Natural Resource Management (NRM)

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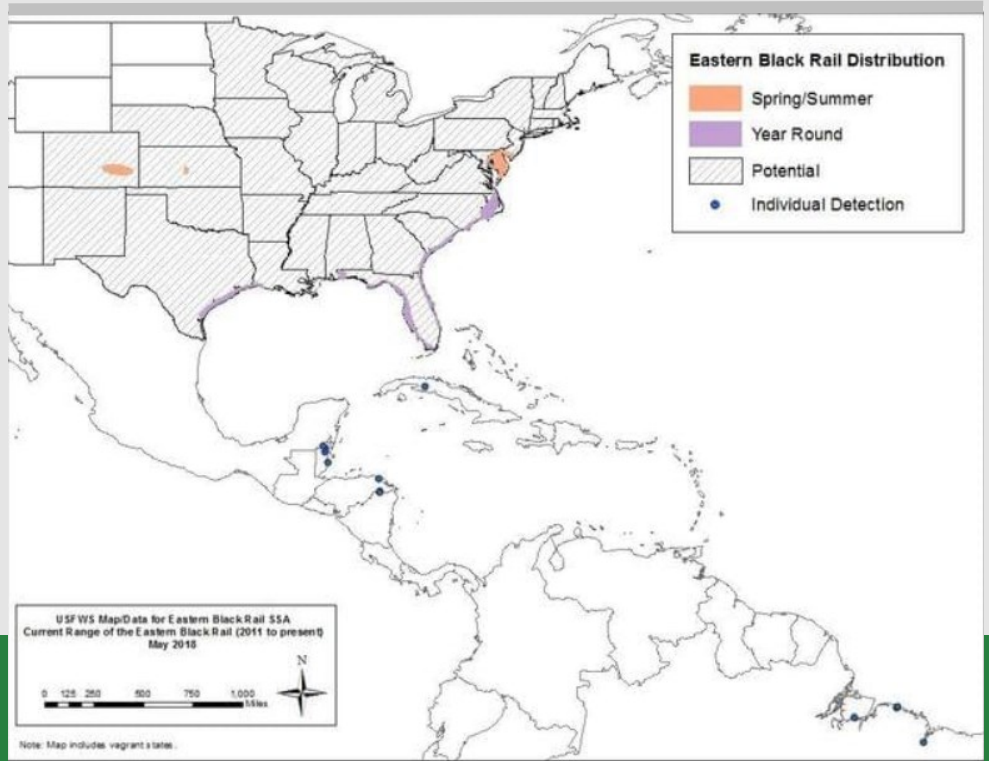
August 2020

USACE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ROLE:

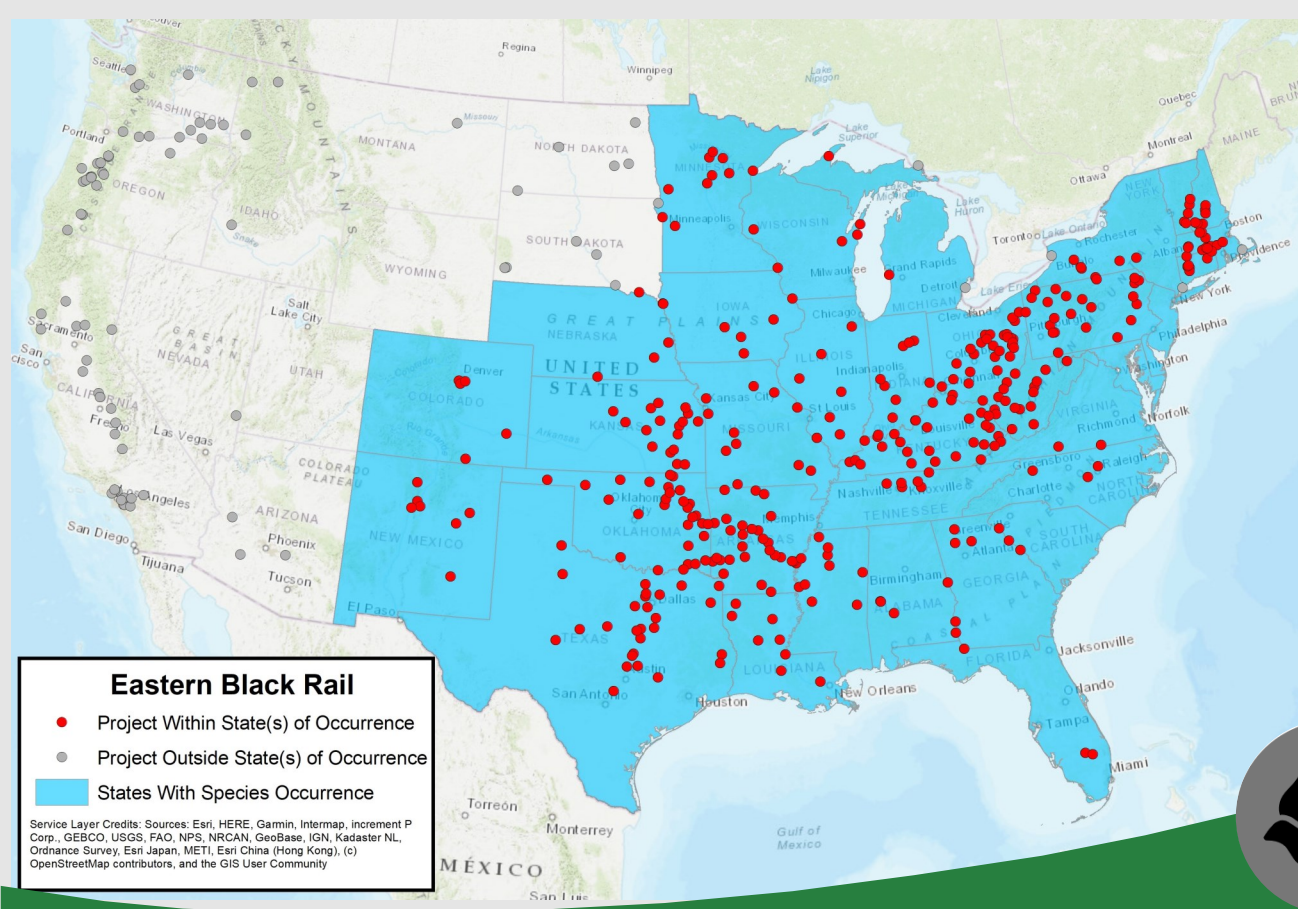
Because of the species' very elusive nature, population counts and nesting locations for the Eastern Black Rail have been difficult to determine by conservation agencies. However, USACE manages public lands and waters that have the capability to support the species. Locks within the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System in USACE's Southwestern Division have reported the potential for the species occurrence.

WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:

USACE works diligently to analyze project plans to ensure that they will not have negative impacts on the Eastern Black Rail or its habitat. All current and future work is closely coordinated with resources agencies including USFWS.



USFWS Map/Data for Eastern Black Rail SSA; Current Range of the Eastern Black Rail (2011 to present); May 2018.



Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ORISE fellow, Institute for Water Resources

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