

## **Monthly Meeting April 7, 2014**

**Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX**

6:30 pm Learning Corner: Talk not yet scheduled; click the link and refresh it to see latest information

7:00 pm [Ornithology Group](#) (OG) Business Meeting

7:30 pm **Program:** Yellow Rails by David Sarkozi

**Field Trip:** Warbler Woods (May 4, 7:00 am), led by Debbie Valdez

[Keeping on the Rails | 2014 Dues are Due!](#)

## **Warbler Woods Field Trip, May 4, 7:00 am**

**Led by Debbie Valdez**

The Houston OG is sponsoring a field trip to Warbler Woods Bird Sanctuary on Sunday, May 4. Best place to stay would be the Hampton Inn and Suites in Schertz. You will need to make your own reservations. We will meet Don Schaezler at the sanctuary gate at 7 am. On the morning of our visit, we will collect \$10 per participant to be donated to the bird sanctuary, which is non-profit. There are several other birding hotspots nearby, including Crescent Bend, Mitchell Lake, and Friedrich Park. Friedrich Park is a guarantee late in the day for the Golden Cheeked Warbler according to Susan Schaezler.

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## Keeping on the Rails

By Hart Rufe (reprinted with permission; first published November 11, 2013)



*This mother Clapper Rail has seven very dark chicks to keep an eye on.*



Rail, a long slender bar extending from one post to another for horse race fans to lean against as they cheer for their horse to win; or, a bar of rolled steel, which when joined with a second one in parallel position forms a track for trains to run upon and block traffic for long periods of time at intersections on Route 1 in Fort Pierce; or, in past times another kind of bar that citizens would use to ride politicians and other petty thieves out of town

upon after tar and feathering, when necessary; or, as a verb, to revile or scold in harsh, insolent, or abusive language, as many have sought to do at our legislators who have recently caused the shut-down of the federal government and threatened the default of the full faith and credit of the good old U S of A. Oh yeah, there is another definition: the term rail applies to any of 127 species of marsh birds in the family Rallidae, which includes the three species we present here today. For a complete list of the rails worldwide with photos, videos, and calls, see: [ibc.lynxeds.com/family/rails-gallinules-coots-rallidae](http://ibc.lynxeds.com/family/rails-gallinules-coots-rallidae).

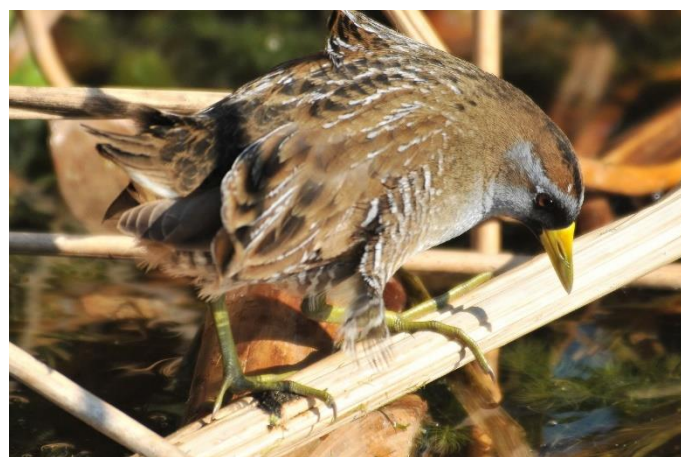
While the official list of rails in Florida numbers nine species, including the American Coot, and both gallinules, it probable predates the adding of the Purple Swamphen as an approved wild bird, living, playing, working and enjoying the sun and warmth of the Sunshine State, albeit, just

another undocumented immigrant. And so there are really 10 rail species in Florida, and interestingly, not any more anywhere else in North America.

Of the 10 species, seven are relatively easy to find in Florida. The American Coot and the Common Gallinule (originally “Gallinule,” then “Moorhen,” and now “Gallinule” again) are found year round just about everywhere, and the Purple Gallinule and Purple Swamphen, while not quite as common as the first two species, can be readily seen in the appropriate habitat. See:



[stlucieaudubon.org/docs/hartBeat/hb130119Purple.html](http://stlucieaudubon.org/docs/hartBeat/hb130119Purple.html).



Conversely, the tiny sparrow-sized Black Rail, the slightly larger, (but smaller than a Sora) Yellow Rail, and the largest of the rails, King Rail, are almost impossible to find. The Black and King Rails are year round residents of Florida, while the Yellow Rail is a winter snowbird. Jewel and I have yet to see any of these three species in Florida. Therefore, we present here the remaining three “not-hard-to-see-but-not easy-to-see” Florida rails: the Sora, the Clapper and the Virginia.

The Sora (*right, 2 views*), with its short yellow bill and black face is found on most of our field trips to Green Cay/Wakodahatchee, Viera and Merritt Island as it is a winter resident usually from September to May. The Clapper Rail (*above, left*) may be as common as the Sora but it is much more secretive and therefore much harder to find even though it is a year round resident of Florida. But the Virginia Rail (*left, 2 views*), another October to March snowbird, is so secretive and reclusive that a birder is more likely to stumble upon it in an unguarded moment than plan to intentionally find it.

All three of these species were found on different trips to Merritt Island National Wildlife Reserve (MINWR), although the mother Clapper Rail with the seven cute little black chicks was found in New Jersey.

This past July the birding world was all agog with excitement at the first ever appearance in North America of a Rufous-necked Wood Rail, a Central and South American species that unexpectedly showed up in New Mexico. Because of commitments, Jewel and I were not able to fly out immediately to add this bird to our lists, and unfortunately, when we were



able to go, the bird was gone. It was there for just over two weeks. [www.sfgate.com/nation/article/Rufous-necked-wood-rail-makes-rare-U-S-visit-4682964.php](http://www.sfgate.com/nation/article/Rufous-necked-wood-rail-makes-rare-U-S-visit-4682964.php). Maybe one will walk by one day as we wait on Route 1 in Fort Pierce for one of those long trains to pass by on a pair of those other kind of rails.

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## 2014 Dues are Due!

Don't forget to renew your ONC/OG dues if you haven't already done so. ONC/OG dues are paid yearly on a calendar basis beginning January 1st. Ornithology Group dues are used to pay honorariums and travel expenses for speakers at OG meetings, to make OG donations to other organizations, and for a few other OG expenses. Life Members of ONC still need to pay yearly OG dues. Pay by check at the next OG meeting or use the form below (it specifies the proper dues amounts) to submit updated information for the ONC database, and mail along with your check to the ONC post office box.

We need your dues to keep the Ornithology Group running!

If you have questions about your membership status, contact Margret Simmons at [msimmons@compassnet.com](mailto:msimmons@compassnet.com) or 713-776-2511.

Thank you for your renewal!

### TO START OR RENEW A MEMBERSHIP:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

ONC Annual Dues: \$ 8.00 for individuals; \$ 15.00 for families

OG Annual Dues: \$ 12.00 for individuals; \$ 15.00 for families

**Total: \$ 20.00 for individuals; \$ 30.00 for families**

Additional contributions are welcome in any amount.

Send to:

Outdoor Nature Club

PO Box 270894

Houston, Texas 77277-0894

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## **About the Ornithology Group**

**Chair:** Nina Rach | 281-433-0651 | NRach@autrevie.com

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**Secretary** | needed

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**OG website:** <http://www.ornithologygroup.org/>

**ONC website:** <http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/>

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