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## **KING RAIL (*Rallus elegans*) AND BLACK RAIL (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) OBSERVATIONS IN THE FLORIDA EVERGLADES**

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The Everglades Complex of Wildlife Management Areas (ECWMA) includes Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area (EWMA), Holey Land Wildlife Management Area (HWMA), and Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area (RWMA). These areas are located in southwestern Palm Beach, western Broward, and northwestern Miami-Dade counties, respectively. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is the lead managing agency on these 730,061 acres of the remaining Everglades ecosystem. The ECWMA encompasses approximately 690,000 acres of wetland, a significant amount of habitat suitable for marsh birds in south Florida.

The Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) and King Rail (*Rallus elegans*) are two of the most secretive birds that inhabit Florida (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 2003). Both species have been experiencing steep population declines throughout their ranges, and the Black Rail has been petitioned for Federal listing (Cooper 2008, USDI 2011). Additionally, both species inhabit densely vegetated marshes, thus making their detection very difficult (FWC 2003).

Confirmed observations of these two rail species in south Florida have not been widely documented. Prior to 2008, there have only been



**Figure 1. Locations of Black and King rails observed in the Everglades Complex of Wildlife Management Areas between 2008 and 2014 (note that some locations represent multiple birds sighted).**

four confirmed observations of Black Rails in the Everglades region of south Florida, two of which were in the EWMA (FWC 2003, FLMNH records). There have been 13 confirmed observations of King Rails in the south Florida Everglades region, all prior to 2008, three of which were in the EWMA (Sykes and Hunter 1978, FWC 2003, FLMNH records).

**Table 1. King and Black rail observations 2008-2014; types and numbers detected.**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Number observed</b>	<b>Month observed</b>	<b>Type of observation</b>
King Rail	6	March, May, September, October	opportunistically heard
King Rail	1	March	flushed by airboat
King Rail	1	August	found dead
King Rail	13	March, April, May	heard during marshbird callback survey
King Rail	5	March, May	opportunistically seen
King Rail	13	April, May, October	heard during bird survey
King Rail	2	March	flushed by prescribed burn
King Rail	1	July	camera trap
Black Rail	3	March	heard during marshbird callback survey
Black Rail	1	November	opportunistically heard
Black Rail	1	March	flushed by prescribed burn
Black Rail	1	March	opportunistically seen

Since 2008, FWC staff have been recording observations of rare marsh birds throughout the ECWMA (Fig. 1). Between 2008 and 2014, there were four documented observations of Black Rails and 31 observations of King Rails within EWMA. In RWMA, two Black Rails and eight King Rails were documented between 2010 and 2014. Three King Rails were observed in HWMA in 2012. These occurrences were made by both sight and sound observations (Table 1). Methods used to document these rails included callback surveys (Conway 2009), roadkill specimens, incidental observations, bird surveys, and camera traps (Fig. 2). Although difficult to detect and document, the number of observations collected by area staff imply that these rail species are likely fairly common throughout the Everglades ecosystem.

Suitable wetland habitat for rails is already limited. The human population in the State of Florida is estimated to double by 2060. An estimated 7 million acres of rural and natural land will need to be developed to support this population growth (Zwick and Carr 2006). Large tracts of wetland habitat on conservation lands like ECWMA and Everglades National Park will be essential to the persistence of the already declining Black and King rail species.

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**Figure 2. King Rail caught by a camera trap on a tree island in Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area Water Conservation Area 3A North, on 8 July 2010.**

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