

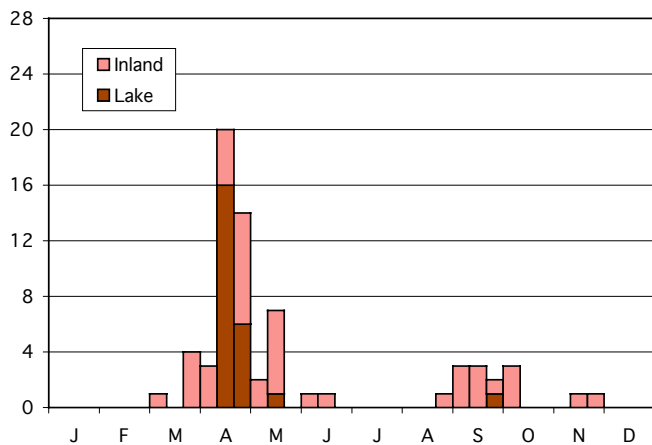
## Yellow Rail

## *Coturnicops noveboracensis*

### Historical Information

First Published record: According to the Mumford files, J.J. Audubon found a few Yellow Rails along the Wabash River near Vincennes. Butler (1890) reported that W.S. Perry found two Yellow Rails, probably in the Kankakee Marsh, 13 April 1876, to provide Indiana's first fully dated report.

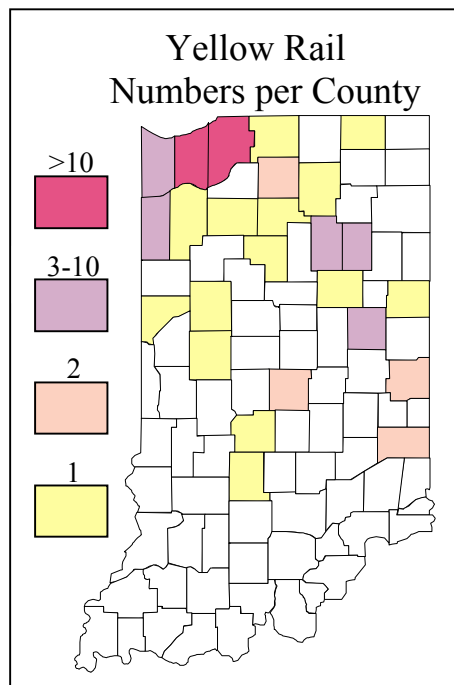
Butler (1890) deemed this small rail a rare migrant and listed reports from Clinton, Decatur, Delaware, and Monroe Counties. By publication of his 1898 work, Butler added that the Yellow Rail was a local summer resident. Keller et al. (1979) considered the Yellow Rail a very rare to casual migrant. Mumford and Keller (1984) provided no status assessment.



### Status

Physical Evidence: Some eight specimens are preserved in museums (S.F. Jackson unpublished list, the Indiana Bird Records Committee, and Kirkpatrick 1980).

STATUS TABLE				
Specimens				
Museum				No.
National Museum of Natural History				5
Univ. of Michigan Museum				1
Cincinnati Museum				1
Ball State Bird Collection				1
20-Year Abundance Table				
	Win	Spr	Sum	Fall
Northern Tier	n	8	n	10
Central Tier	n	10	10	10
Southern Tier	n	n	n	n
Entire State	n	8	10	9



### Current Status

Almost certainly a regular migrant through Indiana, this secretive bird goes unreported most years. Indeed, it has been reported in only ten of the last 20 years. Based on these observations the Yellow Rail is Very Rare (8) in spring, Occasional (9) in fall, and Accidental (10) in summer.

### Occurrence

As shown on the distribution map, 24 of the 25 Indiana counties in which this ultra-furtive species has been reported occur in the northern two-thirds of the state. This distribution is no doubt related to the availability of suitable habitat. Recent spring reports have come from damp grassy areas at Kankakee Sands and the Mississinewa Reservoir spillway. Most autumn reports occur in September or early October.

### Extreme Records

The two November records include a specimen collected in Huntington County 11 November 1903 and a sighting by Robert Gregory near Mooresville 22 November 1955 (Mumford files).

### How Rare Are Yellow Rails?

Butler (1898) provided the following statement from W.S. Perry in 1885 (likely from the Kankakee Marsh), "I consider them quite rare. I hunted every day for six weeks especially for Rails and probably started 1,500 Virginia, 1,500 Sora, 200 King and five Yellow. I think that is about the proportion they occur, although with the experience I had could probably find more if I should try again. I found the Yellow Rail on a very small part of the marsh, say fifty acres in extent, rather high ground that is not so boggy and wet as where the other species of Rail were plenty... The five I have I got between the dates of April 2 and 13." These comments clearly attest to the rarity of Yellow Rails. In contrast, following a 16 April 1960 major storm kill on Lake Michigan, 14 dead Yellow Rails were counted along lakefront beaches (Segal 1960), suggesting that most birds pass through undetected.

Yellow Rail Data				
Maximum Single Party Counts				
Spring				
Number	Date	Location	Observer	Ref.
14*	16-Apr-1960	Lakefront	Simon Segal	IQA
3	12-May-1890	Delaware Co	G.G. Williamson	BU2
3	22-Apr-1988	Inland Marsh	B. Atzhorn (Squires)	KJB
*Bird kill on Lake Michigan (see Segal 1960)				
Fall				
Number	Date	Location	Observer	Ref.
3	01-Sep-1976	Kingsbury FWA	J.F. New	REM
2	18-Sep-1879	Franklin Co	A.W. Butler	BU2
1	24-Sep-1919	N. Porter Co	H.L. Stoddard	HLS

Migration Envelopes						
Entire State						
	Earliest	Arrive	Peak	Depart	Latest	Records
Spring	03-Mar-1901	28-Mar	23-Apr	14-May	3-Jun-1976	34
Fall	21-Aug1971	---	24-Sep	---	22-Nov-1955	11

### **References Cited**

Butler, A. W. (1890) The Birds of Indiana, Appendix to *Transactions of the Indiana Horticultural Society for 1890* (available on the web).

Butler, A. W. (1898) The Birds of Indiana, Indiana Department of Geology and Natural Resources Annual Report, 22:575-1187.

Keller, C.E., S.A. Keller, and T.C. Keller (1979) *Indiana Birds and Their Haunts*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 214 pp.

Kirkpatrick, R.D. (1980) Yellow Rail Specimen taken in Grant County, Indiana, *Indiana Audubon Quarterly*, 58:115-116.

Mumford files: An extensive accumulation of Indiana bird data on 5x7 file cards compiled by Professor R.E. Mumford of Purdue University, West Lafayette.

Mumford, R.E. and C.E. Keller (1984) *The Birds of Indiana*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 376 pp.

Segal, S. (1960) Bird Tragedy in the Dunes, *Indiana Audubon Quarterly*, 38:23-25.