The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County, Virginia Area

Rails, Gallinules, Moorhens, and Coots

Richard A. Rowe

Department of Biology
Virginia Military Institute

Accidental – A bird outside of its normal range (breeding or winter) or outside of its normal migration route
Rare – A bird that is within its normal breeding or over-wintering range or its normal migration route, but should not be expected to be seen in the area on a yearly basis
Unusual – A bird that is within its normal breeding or over-wintering range but is not reported on a regular basis in the county (1-5 sightings per year)
Common – A bird that is regularly seen within the area but may not be present in large numbers or may have a restricted distribution (Locally Common)
Abundant – A bird that is found in large numbers within the county but may have a restricted distribution (Locally Abundant)

Transient – A bird that is seen in the area during migration or as a wandering sub-adult
Year-round – A bird that is present in the area throughout the entire year and is usually a breeder
Summer breeder – A bird that migrates into the area and breeds during the summer
Winter migrant/resident – A bird that migrates into the area and over-winters and then leaves in the spring

<u>Locations</u>

BB = Brownsburg and Bustleburg area including Route 252
BQ = Barger's Quarry
BRP 1 = Blue Ridge Parkway between mileposts 28 and 45 (Route 56 and Route 60)
BRP 2 = Blue Ridge Parkway between mileposts 45 and 64 (Route 60 and the James River)
BRP AO = Blue Ridge Parkway and Apple Orchard Mountain (mileposts 76 to 78)
BS = Big Spring
CT = Chessie Trail
GP = Goshen Pass
KD = Kendal Retirement community
LEX = Lexington
LM = Lake Merriweather at Goshen Pass
LR = Lake Robertson
LT = Locher Tract
MF = McCormick's Farm
MR = Maury River
NM = North Mountain
OFRP = Old Farm Road Pond
PQ = Quarry at the Ponds
RB = Rockbridge Baths area
RC = Rockbridge County in general
SR = South River
WL = Willow Lake

Notes:
Cameron's Pond, which was located near the current Rockbridge County High School, drained naturally in 19??.

Womeldorf Farm ponds are located just outside of Lexington in the new, Pond's housing development.
Lake Robertson and Lake Merriweather were created after Murray published his account of the Birds of Rockbridge County.

Gruiformes:

Rails, Gallinules, Moorhens, and Coots
(All photos: Rails, Gallinules, Moorhens, and Coots)

Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*):

Occurrence: There have been no recent sightings
Dates: Murray reports two sightings, one in 1937 and one in 1954. He considers Yellow Rails to be rare in the area.
Location: LEX
History: Both reports were from wet/marshy areas near Lexington
Status: Accidental and not expected in the area.

Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris*):

Occurrence: There have been no recent sightings
Dates: 9 November
Location: RC
History: Murray reports finding a dead Clapper Rail on 9 November 1928. There is no indication that this species normally occurs in the area, and Murray suspected that the bird may have been shot along the coast and disposed of in the county.
Status: Accidental and not expected in the area.

King Rail (*Rallus elegans*):

Occurrence: There have been no recent sightings
Dates: 15 May
Location: southern RC
History: Murray reports one sighting on 15 May 1940 on South Buffalo Creek. A second, unconfirmed sighting was reported from Big Spring in August of 1929. There have been no recent sightings.
Status: Accidental and not expected in the area.

Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*):

Occurrence: There are two reports of a Virginia Rail in the county (1932 and 1953).
Dates: 26 September and 17 November
Location: BS, JR in Glasgow
History: Murray reports seeing a Virginia Rail at Big Spring on 26 September 1932. Bob Paxton found a Virginia Rail in Glasgow on 17 November 1953. There have been no recent sightings.
Status: Accidental and not expected in the area.

Sora (*Porzana carolina*):

Occurrence: Transient during migration
Dates: 13 April to 27 May and 12 August to 5 November
Locations: Cameron's Pond, BS, JR in Glasgow, OFRP
History: A juvenile Sora was located at Old Farm Road Rd. pond 14 August 2011 by Lucy Rowe, Dick Rowe, and Kieran Kilday. On 1 September 2012, an adult Sora was located at Old Farm Rd. pond by Dick Rowe. Murray reports that Soras were common in the spring (13 April to 27 May) and fall (29 August to 5 November) between 1928 to 1932 on Cameron's Pond. Between 1932 and 1948 he notes that it was less common at Cameron's Pond. Soras were also seen at Big Spring until 1932. Bob Paxton reported a sighting on 17 November 1953 in Glasgow. The draining of Cameron's Pond undoubtedly has had an impact on the movement of Soras through the area.
Status: Uncommon and not expected to be seen in the county.
Photo: Old Farm Rd. pond, 1 September 2012.
For additional photos: Sora

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*):

Occurrence: One sighting in 1940.
Dates: 16 May 1940
Location: Southern RC
History: Murray reports one sighting on South Buffalo Creek on 16 May 1940. There have been no recent sightings.
Status: Accidental and not expected in the area.

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*):

Occurrence: There are three reports from the late 1920's and early 1930's.
Dates: April and May
Locations: BS, LEX
History: Murray reports three records; 1 May 1927 near Lexington, 19-25 April 1929 at Big Spring, 3 May 1932 at Big Spring. There have been no recent sightings.
Status: Accidental and not expected in the area.

American Coot (*Fulica americana*):

Occurrence: Uncommon migrant
Dates: October (earliest sighting 22 October at Willow Lake) through March (latest sighting 27 March at Willow Lake)
Locations: WL, LR, BS, PQ, BQ, LM

History: There are numerous sightings of Coots in the county (Willow Lake, Lake Robertson, Lake Merriweather, and Barger Quarry Pond) with 22 October 2006 as the earliest fall date and 27 March 2005 as the latest spring date. A flock of 20+ Coots has been reported on Willow Lake during the winters of 2003-04, 2004-05, and in 2006. On 1 November 2009 a group of 15 Coots was seen at Willow Lake. Single individuals were reported during the late fall of 2010 on Big Spring, Pond's quarry, and Willow Lake. November seems to be the most common month to see Coots, especially at Willow Lake. Fifteen reports of Coots are listed in the CBC with most of the reports from the early and mid 1980's, but there are three recent reports (2008, 2009, 2010) on the CBC. Murray considers Coots to be transients and seen in the spring between 20 March and 15 May and in the fall between 23 September and 13 December.
Status: Fall and spring migrant and not expected in the area.
Photo: Willow Lake, 21 April 2012.
For additional photos: American Coot

Sandhill Crane (*Grus Canadensis*):

Occurrence: There is a single record of a Sandhill Crane in the county
Dates: 5 September 2012
Locations: OFRP
History: On Dick Rowe located a single Sandhill Crane at Old Farm Rd. Pond. The crane was mixed in with a group of Canada Geese. The bird remained at the pond for approximately 10 minutes. The bird appeared to be an immature crane. The crane represents a county record. A report was submitted to VARCOM.
Status: Rare migrant and not expected in the area.
Photo: Old Farm Rd Pond, 5 September 2012
Additional photos: Sandhill Crane