

Clapper Rail

Rallus crepitans

The large Clapper Rail is abundant in saltwater marshes and mangrove swamps from the U.S. East Coast to Central America and the Caribbean. This secretive bird lives most of its life concealed in dense vegetation. In 2014, the species was split into three: Clapper Rail; Ridgway's Rail of California, Arizona, and Nevada; and Mangrove Rail of South America.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

- Medium-sized, chicken-like marsh bird.
- Compact body.
- Short tail.
- Strong legs.
- Long, slightly down-curved bill.
- Rounded wings.
- Gray or reddish; considerable variation in plumage color within many subspecies.
- Dull stripes on flanks.
- Males average larger than females, but the sexes are alike in plumage.

Immature Description

Downy chick black, with pied bill. Juvenile similar to adult, but marking indistinct and with variable amount of black on sides.

Cool Facts

- Clapper Rails have special salt glands that enable them to drink sea water.
- Eggs submerged in up to 18 inches of water during high tide are still capable of hatching.
- When chicks are about a week old, the parents divide the brood and each look after half the offspring.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 12.6 - 16.1 inches
- Wingspan - 9.2 - 14.1 inches
- Weight - 7.1 - 14.1 ounces

