

2011 Wood River Wetland Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis noveboracensis*) Survey Report

Project Description

The Bureau of Land Management's Wood River Wetland is located in T34S-R 7 1/2E; the wetland borders Agency Lake to the south, seven-mile canal to the west, the Wood River to the east and is bordered by private to the north (Fig 1). Restoration to improve water quality and habitat back to original conditions on approximately 3,000 acres of historically used cattle grazing land within the wetland has been ongoing since 1996 (Popper 2001). Dominant tree species are cottonwood, willows, and aspen. Among the many sedges and grasses the wetland plants consist primarily of Hardstem Bulrush (Tule), Common Cattail, Wocus, and big leaf lupine.

Yellow rails are a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) sensitive species due to loss of wetland habitat and are being monitored in the Wood River Wetland by the BLM. Yellow rails are a small marshbird and are characterized by a dark crown and eye stripe, a short tail, and a yellow chest and face. Rails are a thin bird that allows them to move about quickly in dense marsh vegetation. Their distinct clicking calls are heard exclusively at night, this, along with their secretive nature, can make gathering information on them difficult.

Yellow rail surveys were conducted from May through July 2011, according to the 2006 yellow rail protocol written by Kenneth J. Popper of The Nature Conservancy. The goal of the survey was to determine whether or not yellow rails are utilizing habitat within the BLM Wood River Wetland and surrounding private lands.

Historic Activity

Inventories done between 1982 and 1992 by the Oregon Natural Heritage Program (ORNHC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) provided information on yellow rails in Oregon (Popper 2006). Due to limited information on yellow rails, in 1988 ORNHIC and TNC began doing surveys in the Wood River Valley and surrounding areas (Popper 2006).

The Wood River Wetland was previously surveyed for yellow rails in 1999, 2000, 2003, and 2004. Previous reports from these surveys demonstrate that yellow rails have been heard within the Wood River Wetland (Table 1) but due to the lack of systematic surveys, information is limited. The 2004 report indicated that a dead yellow rail was found within the wetland, signifying that yellow rails use this area if they have a few inches of standing water. Total yellow rails heard throughout previous surveyed years are 17 birds.

Category	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Totals
Males heard calling at Wood River Wetland	0	0	6	6	3	0	1	0	0	16
*One Male found dead 2004									1	1
Total										17

Table 1. Results of Yellow Rail surveys at Wood River Wetland.

Survey Methods

Kenneth Popper was contacted by telephone to provide clarification on survey protocol and any additional questions concerning yellow rails. Communication was maintained through e-mail for any additional questions.

The survey area was laid out using ArcMap in the Nad 83 datum utilizing 10T UTM coordinates. Designated survey points were spaced .4 miles apart (Figure 1) (Popper 2006). The route was driven during daylight hours prior to nocturnal surveys in order to ensure road access across dikes was safe and disturbance of nesting waterfowl was limited. All survey points were accessible by vehicle with the exception of points 22, 23, and 24, which were located on a dike that cuts across the middle of the wetland; these survey points were completed on foot. The last survey, completed on July 11, 2011 was abbreviated due to the west-side Sevenmile Canal being overgrown and inaccessible. This survey was limited to the north end of the Wood River Wetland, where yellow rail responses were more likely, as had been demonstrated in previous surveys.

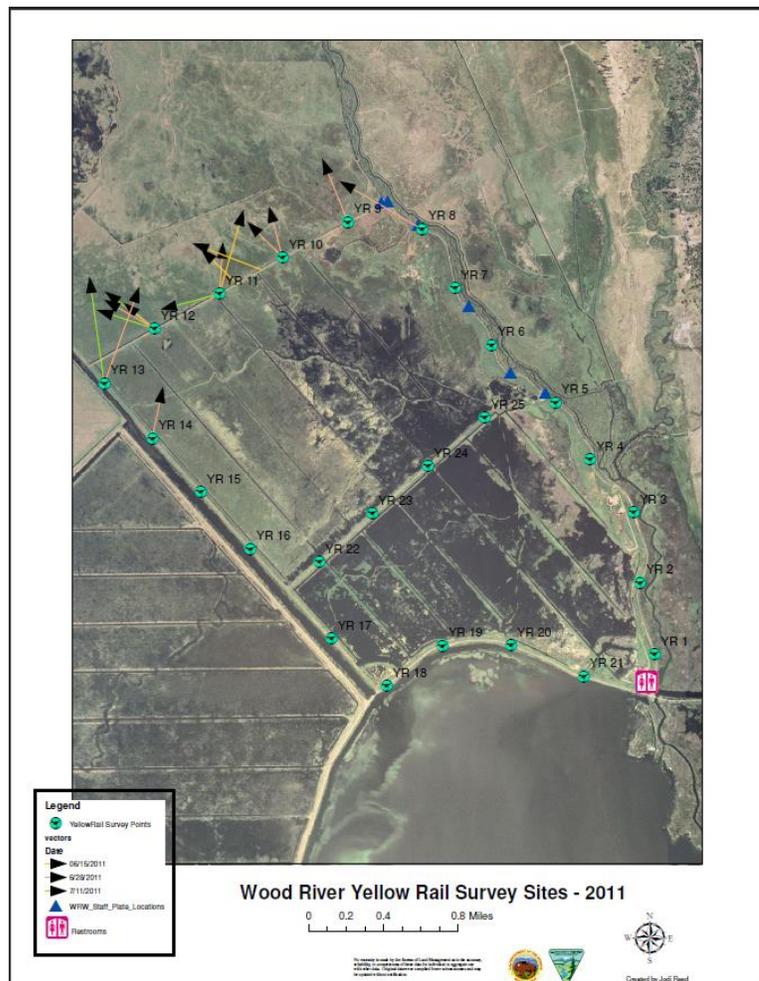


Figure 1. Yellow Rail Survey and Detection Map.

Results

The Wood River Wetland was surveyed five times between May 19 and July 11, 2011, with 19 rails heard. Initial surveys did not produce yellow rail responses; however, response rates rose in June before declining again in July (Figure 3). Most responses came from private property on the north end of the wetland. However, one response was encountered in the northeast section of the BLM Wood River Wetland property.

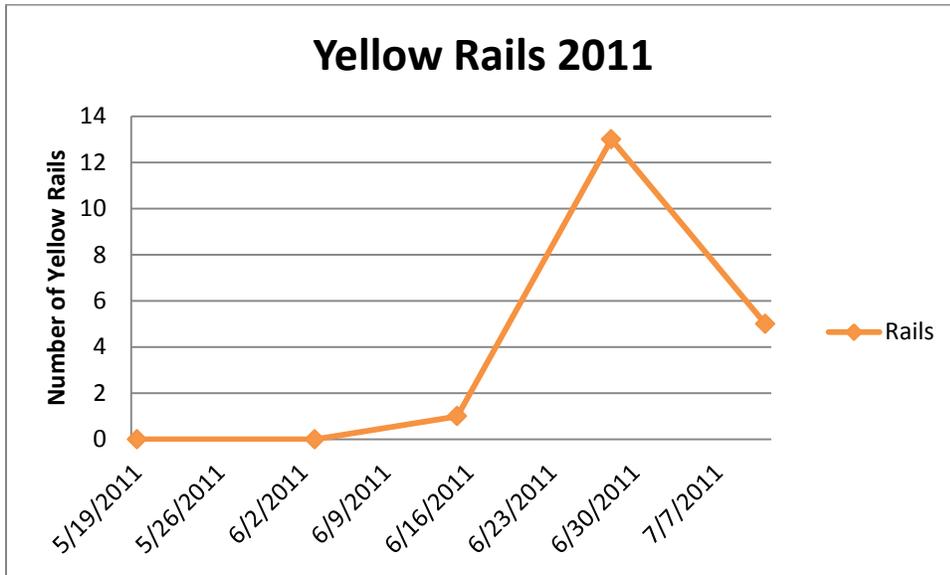


Figure 3. Graph of Yellow Rails encountered during survey.

Conclusion

Yellow rails were documented during the survey effort with majority of detections located on private lands (fig 1). Yellow rails are sensitive to both water levels and vegetation types. This survey effort and the monitoring of water levels may provide a correlation between water levels, vegetation types and yellow rail presence on the wood river wetland. Managing for habitat that would provide surface water levels for breeding and foraging habitat may encourage yellow rails to utilize the Wood River Wetland at higher level.

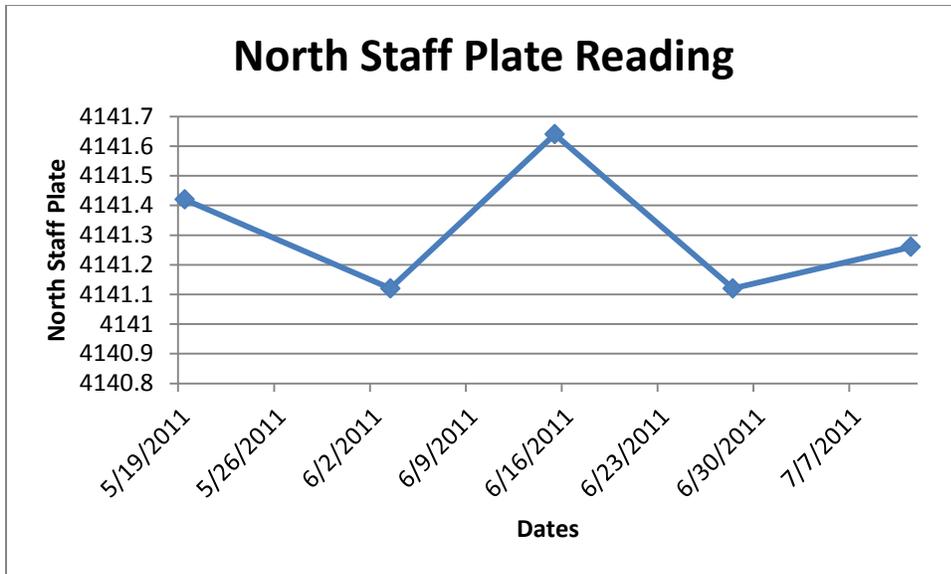


Figure 4. North staff plate water reading levels.

REFERENCES

- Popper, K. 2006. Results for Yellow Rail Survey at Klamath Marsh in 2006 with Recommendations and Protocol for Future Surveys and Analysis of Yellow Rail Surveys at Sycan Marsh from 1997-2005. Unpubl. Report to US Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon State Office, Portland.
- Popper, K. 2004. Yellow Rail Surveys in Southcentral Oregon, 2003, and 2004. Unpubl. Report to US Fish and Wildlife Service, Klamath Falls, and US Forest Service, Crescent Ranger District.
- Popper, K. and S. Lundsten. 2001. Breeding Ecology of Yellow Rails at Fourmile Creek, Wood River Wetland, Mares Egg Spring, and additional areas in the Klamath Basin of Southcentral Oregon 2000. Unpubl. Report the Klamath Falls Resource Area, Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

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