

**SPECIES OF THE MONTH****RIDGWAY'S RAIL****MARCH 2025**

The Ridgway's Rail (*Rallus obsoletus*) was accepted as a separate species in 2014 when the American Ornithologists Union split the Clapper Rail (*R. longirostris*) into 3 species. There are 6 subspecies of Ridgway's Rail, and the one found in southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico is the Yuma Ridgway's Rail (*R. o. yumanensis*), which resides in freshwater habitat. Historically, Ridgway's Rail was found in Arizona only along the lower Colorado River from Yuma north to the Bill Williams River area. In the latter part of the 20th century, it expanded northward to Topock Marsh and eastward along the Gila and Salt rivers. It breeds from March through August in fragmented patches of emergent wetland vegetation that are separated by large expanses of unsuitable habitat primarily agricultural lands or desert. It nested as far east as the Picacho Reservoir, but water is no longer stored there, and the last sighting was in 2011. Some remain on the breeding grounds year-round. Others disperse or migrate, such as the one in the photo shown here—sometimes over long distances and inhospitable habitats—to Mexico. Ridgway's Rails in Arizona primarily feed on crayfish, clams, isopods, water beetles, and small fish.



Ridgway's Rail, Patagonia Lake, Santa Cruz County, 25 October 2023. Photo by Steve Holmes

The Ridgway's Rail does not overlap in range with the Clapper Rail (*R. crepitans*) of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and the Caribbean. Its plumage is generally more cinnamon brown rather than grayish brown, and it averages larger than the Clapper Rail. Ridgway's Rail co-occurs with Virginia Rail (*R. limicola*), but the latter is much smaller, with longer legs, grayer cheeks, and brighter bill color.

Since 1967, even before it was classified a separate species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has considered all of the subspecies of Ridgway's Rail, including Yuma, endangered. This is primarily due to the small size of its population and the limited availability of its habitat. Current management includes constant and consistent population monitoring, managing wetlands year-round on the assumption that at least part of the population is resident year-round, and restoring and maintaining wetlands along the Colorado and Gila rivers.