

Sora *Porzana carolina*



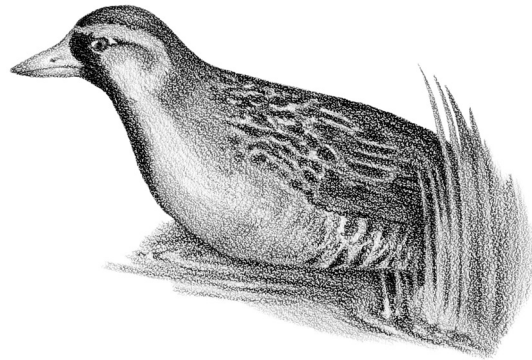
Folk Name: Ortolan, Carolina Rail
Status: Migrant and rare Winter Visitor
Abundance: Rare to Uncommon
Habitat: Marshes

The Sora is arguably the easiest of our six rail species to get a look at and to identify by sight. Its call is quite distinctive as well. It is a medium-sized rail, about 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, which is less than an inch smaller than the Virginia Rail. It has a short, stout, yellow or greenish-yellow bill. It may respond to a recording of its call during migration, but it is usually reluctant to vocally respond to a recording in the winter.

It is a rare to uncommon spring and fall migrant here and we have many records from winter as well. We have reports from all months of the year except June and July. Most reports are of single birds. This species is probably much more common in the region than our records indicate. Spring migration dates range from 19 March through 26 May. Most are seen in April or early May. Fall dates range from 5 August through 20 November. Most are reported from mid-September through mid-October. Winter records have been mostly reported in December or early January. We have one record from the month of February.

In the fall of 1878, Leverett Loomis shot a Sora after a heavy storm forced it down in the town of Chester. He described the Sora as common in migration “in swampy meadows” and “not easily flushed; the mowers [cutting hay] sometimes cut the grass over one before it can be made to take wing.” Elmer Brown discovered a Sora in Salisbury on May 26, 1923. This still stands as our latest spring date. Charlie Sellers submitted the first records of Sora from Mecklenburg County. He sighted one on April 4, 1939, one on April 7, 1939, and one on May 3, 1939. John Trott captured a Sora with a leg injury in Stanly County on September 16, 1956, in a roadside ditch. He released it the following day. A “freshly killed” immature female Sora was found on September 24, 1957, in the yard of Mrs. J.P. Hamilton in the suburbs of Charlotte. Mrs. Hamilton noted “a trace of black” at the base of the bird’s bill. Two Sora were collected from the base of the WSOC tower on October 2, 1960, after they collided with the tower during migration on the previous night. The disposition of these specimens is not known.

Sora have been reported on multiple Spring Bird Counts and Christmas Bird Counts in the region since the 1960s. Elizabeth Clarkson listed the Sora as a “fairly common spring and fall transient” in her 1965 checklist for Mecklenburg County, but later revised this to “formerly a regular transient” in 1986. On January 13, 1990, David



Wright played a tape of the call of a Sora at a marsh at the Martin-Marietta (Vulcan) Quarry on Nations Ford Road. He received an immediate response from one hiding there. He returned to this marsh three months later and found three Sora skulking between the clumps of grasses and sedges. Three is the largest count we have on record from the region. However, in Fairfield County, just on the periphery of the region, counts of eight and five have been recorded within the past decade.

Sora have been reported in the region in all but three of the years since the turn of the twenty-first century. Many have responded to loud hand clapping or recordings of calls. Many have been photographed. Several reports are of birds found injured. One of these injured Sora was found on August 27, 2010, on a road near Crowders Mountain—very close to the Cleveland–Gaston county line. It was turned over to a local wildlife rehabilitator for care and was later released. Another bird found on October 12, 2015, was brought to Davidson College; unfortunately, this bird did not survive.



Sora at Latta Plantation Nature Preserve. (Kevin Metcalf)