



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Sora
*Porzana carolina***

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: A small, plump, gray-brown rail (8 to 9.75 inches in length), the Sora has large feet, a short tail, and a short yellow bill. Adults have a distinctive black patch on the face and throat. Because of its secretive habits, this species is more often heard than seen. Calls include a loud descending whinny, a plaintive whistled *ker-wee*, and a sharp *keek*.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: The Sora is a rare breeding species in Massachusetts, nesting at widely scattered wetlands where suitable habitat occurs. A statewide survey of marsh birds during May, June, and early July in 1991-93 found Soras in only 30 of 177 wetlands surveyed, and estimated that most wetlands supported only 1 or 2 pairs. NHESP does not track occurrences of Soras in Massachusetts.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: In Massachusetts, the Sora breeds primarily in freshwater marshes dominated by cattails with good interspersions of other emergent, floating-leaved, and submergent vegetation and open water. It is also found in wet meadows in late summer and early fall, and in salt marshes during migration. Soras are attracted to patches of wild rice in late summer and early fall.

THREATS: Loss and degradation of wetland habitats through draining, filling, siltation, invasion by exotic vegetation (such as purple loosestrife and *Phragmites*), and lowering of local water tables caused by water withdrawals associated with suburban development are all threats to this species. The effect of hunting on local breeding birds is uncertain, but may be minimal because of low hunting pressure and the influx of migrant Soras into the state in early fall.



Photo by Chris Buelow, NHESP

REFERENCES:

- Melvin, S.M., and J.P. Gibbs. 1996. Sora (*Porzana carolina*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 250 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Petersen, W.R., and W.R. Meservey. 2003. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA.
- Veit, R., and W.R. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.

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A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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