Carolina Wren, and Northern Cardinal, species that are generally absent from the installation (perhaps because there are no bird feeders in the training areas). This training area can be heavily used by hunters during the spring Turkey season and in the fall, so birders should be aware of other recreational users.

Pleasant Road

We did not include a specific shrubland bird tour because shrublands are widely scattered throughout Fort Drum, and birds typical of this habitat type can be found along the grassland and forest tours. In case there are shrub birds you may have missed on these tours, a good place to look for them is along Pleasant Road, which runs northeast from State Highway 26 to County Highway 29 near the west end of Reedville Road. Pleasant Road passes through extensive shrubland and early successional woodland, with stands of more mature trees and numerous streams and wetlands. Common nesting species here include American Woodcock, Whip-poor-will, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, and Canada Warblers, Eastern Towhee, and White-throated Sparrow. Fort Drum has five summer records for Yellow-breasted Chat since 1991, with four of them coming from TA 3 west of Pleasant Road.

Postscript

Since this article was written, Fort Drum has developed a new training exercise that may result in closure of the portion of County Highway 29 that is on Fort Drum. Such a closure will require an alteration of the directions given for the grassland tour relating to travel from the airfield area to the core Fort Drum grasslands. When you reach Highway 29, follow these directions instead: turn left onto Highway 29 and drive north 0.8 miles; turn right onto a gravel road; drive north, then northeast, for 1.4 mile to the intersection between Reedville Road and Antwerp Tank Trail. Resume following the directions in the grassland tour at this intersection. However, if Highway 29 is completely blocked off, backtrack 0.5 mile on the Main Tank Trail to a gravel road that heads north (this will be on your right as you come from Highway 29); turn right onto it and drive 1.9 mile north to the intersection of Reedville Road and Antwerp Tank Trail.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ray Rainbolt, Fort Drum's Fish and Wildlife Program Manager, reviewed a draft of this paper and provided comments that greatly improved the manuscript. Ray asks that birders report any new or unusual sightings at 315-772-9636 or 772-4999, or by mail addressed to: Fish and Wildlife Management Program, 85 First St. W, IMNE-DRM-PWE, Fort Drum, NY 13602.

A TALE OF TWO RAILS

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The Marine Nature Study Area (MNSA) is a small, protected piece of the original tidal wetlands on Nassau County's South Shore, in the village of Oceanside. The MNSA was opened to the general public in April of 1970 as a site for public education and studies explaining the importance and productivity of this local ecosystem. Years of observation have yielded a rich record of the numbers and diversity of birds at this little 52-arce preserve. To date, the MNSA has recorded 271 species of birds, including escapees, which have made their way to this hidden jewel behind suburban Long Island. Counts of selected bird species are conducted twice a day, an hour at opening and again an hour before closing.

On 8 June 2006, the weather was rainy but began to clear around 4:45 pm, during the end of the day bird count. I noticed a Great Black-backed Gull swoop down toward the marsh and flush a chestnut-colored bird from the grass. To my surprise and amazement, there stood a King Rail, a new species for the MNSA checklist. Flabbergasted that I had no camera on-board my cart, I made my way back to the office to gather my equipment. The tide was high and still rising, so I changed shoes and went out into the flooding marsh to see if I could relocate and photograph this rare sighting. After 30-45 minutes of wading knee-high in the marsh and playing a King Rail call, the bird popped its head up and responded with what sounded to me like a Clapper Rail call. The bird was foraging along the flooded creeks, walking on the tall grasses. As it continued along it met up with a Clapper Rail. Both birds continued to move through the marsh together, the King just a few steps ahead of the Clapper. Their consistent proximity suggested to me the possibility that they were paired.

The odd couple was seen on and off in the same general location for the next a few days (Fig. 1). On 14 June, while checking on the status of a Tree Swallow nest box, I stumbled on a surprising discovery. Out of the marsh grass popped the King Rail, a mere three feet from me, but this time its behavior was remarkably different. Instead of popping up and scurrying away into the dense cordgrass, it stood its ground and gave typical-sounding King Rail calls. Moreover, it performed an injured bird distraction display (Fig. 2). I took a closer look at the site it had emerged from, and there, underneath a dome of grass blades, I found a woven, bowl-shaped nest containing ten white and brown speckled eggs.

During the next few weeks, the nest was watched at limited intervals, to minimize disturbance. During these brief periods of observation, I observed that the King Rail (presumably the female) did most of the daytime incubation, whereas its Clapper Rail mate incubated from dusk to dawn.

Figure 1. King and Clapper rails, June 2006,
Marine Nature Study Area, Nassau County, NY © M. Farina.

Figure 2. King Rail performing distraction display near nest, 14 June 2006,
Marine Nature Study Area, Nassau County, NY © M. Farina.

On the afternoon of 4 July, the incubating King flushed from the nest, and I was able to note that all that remained in the nest were egg shells. Concerned that a predator had found the nest, I went in a little closer to investigate. Out of the corner of my eye I saw movement. Then heard some peeping and saw black downy chicks the size of golf balls scattered around the perimeter of the nest. I retreated immediately, having discerned only three or four chicks, but I suspected that all ten where somewhere close by. Both parents circled around me performing there injured bird routine.

Over the next few weeks, sporadic observations were made. The family was observed feeding the chicks outside the parking lot in the creek behind the interpretive board. This was the first time more than three chicks were visible. A total of seven chicks were seen huddling around the Clapper as it brought in a freshly killed Blue Crab (*Callinectes sapidus*). The parents kept the chicks divided between them most of the time, perhaps to prevent destruction of the entire brood by a predator, or perhaps simply to ease the feeding burden. The Clapper was seen dragging in Blue Crabs, killing them, and then allowing the chicks to pick on their own (Fig 3). The King caught mainly individual fiddler crabs or clam worms and then fed these to each individual in its care (Fig. 4). After a feeding session was complete, the parents would feed themselves and preen for a couple of minutes. The chicks would then explore on their own or stay with one of the parents. The Clapper would then strut with its wings fanned horizontally and puffed out until one of the chicks took shelter under its umbrella. The Clapper made a low hooting call before making its way with some of the chicks south down the creek.

Figure 3. Young with Clapper Rail parent, July 2006,
Marine Nature Study Area, Nassau County, NY © M. Farina.

Figure 4. Young with King Rail parent, July 2006, Marine Nature Study Area, Nassau County, NY © M. Farina.

Figure 5. Possible King x Clapper Rail hybrid, August 2006, Marine Nature Study Area, Nassau County, NY © M. Farina.

A few weeks later, three juvenile rails that had been foraging around the east bridge were loudly chased by the King Rail. These chicks were of a different age class than the young of the hybrid pair, three of which were nearby, and were presumably Clapper Rail young from a different pair. Making matters even more complicated, a noticeably small Clapper Rail (not the bird from the focal pair) was also present nearby, with two older chicks. Thus, three different age classes were seen in close proximity. In mid-August, I observed several immature rails showing color patterns suggesting they might be hybrids (Fig. 5).

In conclusion, these observations add to a growing body of data on mixed pairings of King and Clapper rails (Poole et al. 2005). In this instance, an individual of the typically fresh to brackish water inhabitant King Rail survived, nested, and successfully fledged young in a high salinity saltmarsh habitat, typically regarded as optimal Clapper Rail habitat. It is noteworthy that a King Rail was seen well and photographed in saltmarsh habitat on Nassau County's barrier beach, near Tobay Pond, from 16 April to 5 May 2006 (Lindsay and Mitra 2006).

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