

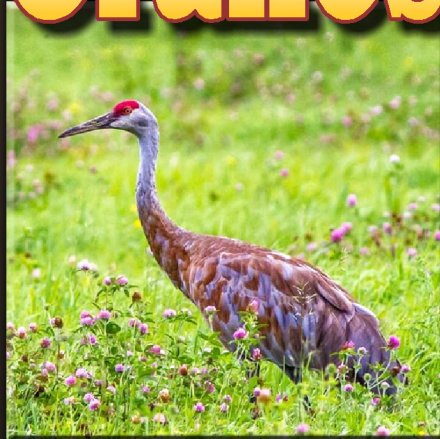
GRUIFORMES

(Cranes, Rails...)

Rails



Cranes



Limpkins

(not native to Mojave Desert)



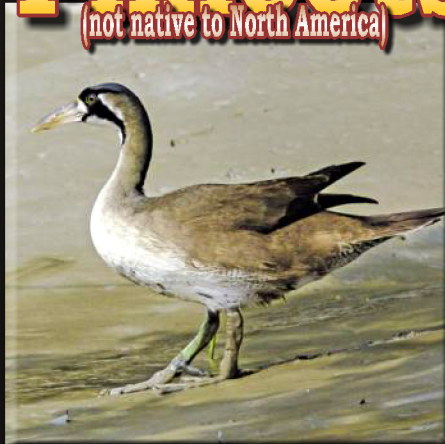
Flufftails

(not native to North America)



Finfoots

(not native to North America)



Trumpeters

(not native to North America)



Family RALLIDAE (Rails)

American Coot (*Fulica americana*)

Measurements:

Ave. Length: 15.5" Ave. Wing Span: 24"

Average Weight: 1.4 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; plump; dark charcoal to black body; stubby, sloping, white bill (tipped with dark band) and shield, often topped with red knob; gray to yellow legs with lobed, rather than webbed, feet; stubby tail; white-tipped secondaries seen in flight; red eyes; both genders similar, though females can be somewhat smaller.

Notes:

common; found in wetlands (marshes, ponds, lakes, etc.) throughout most of NA, n into Canada, s to Panama, rare visitor to UK; forages on grass, or dives primarily for aquatic plants, but also vertebrates and invertebrates; often found in large flocks (called rafts) in city parks and golf courses

Mojave presence: year-round

Comment:

One of the most common waterbirds seen overall, and certainly the most common of the rails, such as the **Sora** and **Virginia Rail**, which are usually quite secretive (generally preferring the cover of reeds and cattail stands). Coots are so common, in fact, that they are often somewhat of a nuisance while grazing on golf course grasses...as if we weekend golfers need anymore distractions to compound our already marginal skills!

The American Coot occurs as several subspecies, and is a very close relative of the Common Gallinule.



Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



Overton WMA; Overton, NV



Overton WMA; Overton, NV



Angel Park GC; LV, NV



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Overton WMA; Overton, NV



Coyote Spgs GC; NV



Desert Pines GC; LV, NV

Family RALLIDAE (Rails)

Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*)

Measurements:

Ave. Length: 14" Ave. Wing Span: 21"

Average Weight: 11 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

dark gray with brown on upperwings, white stripe on sides, white outer tail feathers; distinctive red shield extending into red bill tipped with yellow; greenish-yellow legs; dark eyes; both adult genders similar, but juveniles lack red bill and shield

Notes:

common; thrives in wetlands throughout eastern and sw US, the Caribbean, and south to SA (except the Amazon and southern regions); feeds on a variety of aquatic plants and invertebrates; wide, unwebbed feet allow it to negotiate foraging in low shrubs (juvenile at left) or the surface of water plants (bottom left) without sacrificing swimming mobility in the water

Mojave presence: year-round

Comment:

The Common Moorhen, a close relative of the **American Coot**, was split into two separate species in 2001. The AOU (American Ornithologists Union) now recognizes the New World variety as the **Common Gallinule** (*Gallinula galeata*), and the Old World equivalent as the **Eurasian Moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*).

Differences between the seven subspecies of gallinules are so subtle that they cannot be determined in the field by simple observation other than solely by location, which is still not completely reliable due to overlapping by migrators. The birds pictured here represent the **Antillean Common Gallinule** (*Gallinula galeata cerceris*) found in the Caribbean and South Florida. The top two are from Pompano Beach, and the bottom two were photographed at Lake Okeechobee in Florida.

adult



yellow-tipped red bill

Bird Viewing Pk; Hend., NV

adult



brown wings

Bird Viewing Pk; Hend., NV

juvenile



pale bill

Bird Viewing Pk; Hend., NV

wings often held high while swimming



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV

female



showin' some tail

juvenile

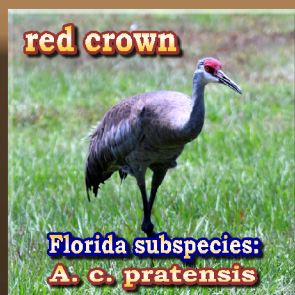


found a juicy morsel



Family RALLIDAE (Cranes)

Sandhill Crane (*Antigone/Grus canadensis*)



Ocala, Florida



Net River; Upper Penn.; MI



Ocala, Florida



Net River; Upper Penn.; MI

Measurements:

Ave. Length: 46" Ave. Wing Span: 77"

Average Weight: 9.5 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; gray plumage with brown patches, brown pattern on lighter upperwings, red crown, white cheeks, yellow eyes, long neck and black legs; flies with neck extended*; genders similar (females slightly smaller)

Notes:

common (though once threatened); thrives in wetlands, prairies, grasslands throughout central to western NA; summer breeding grounds extend from ne Siberia south through most of CAN and isolated areas of w US; migrates south in large flocks to MEX; year-round subspecies in FL and Cuba; 5-6 subspecies; mainly herbivorous (seeds, grains, etc.), but northern populations will also consume insects, reptiles, snails, etc.

Mojave presence: migratory; rare

Comment:

Once assigned to the polyphyletic genus *Grus*, molecular studies have since determined that the species should properly be placed in the monophyletic genus *Antigone*.

Differences between the subspecies are so subtle that they are quite difficult to distinguish in the field by simple observation other than solely by location, which is unreliable with migrating birds. **Lesser Sandhills** (*A. c. canadensis*) are generally smaller and shorter than the **Greater** variety (*A. c. tabida*).

(*distinguished from herons that fly with their necks coiled)

Bosque del Apache NWR near Socorro, NM, is famous for its huge flocks of wintering sandhills. The "Festival of the Cranes" is held the weekend before Thanksgiving to celebrate the arrival of the birds. While rare in the Mojave Desert, sandhills have been observed at the **Bill Williams NWR** near Lake Havasu City, AZ, and the **Pahrnagat NWR** and **Overton WMA** in Clark Co., NV.

Family ARAMIDAE (Limpkins)

Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*)

Measurements:

Ave. Length: 27" Ave. Wing Span: 41"

Average Weight: 2.5 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; brown plumage with olive luster and white streaks; long, slightly curved bill; dark eyes, long neck and long gray legs

Notes:

uncommon; active day and night in tropical wetlands of South and Central America, the Caribbean, and Florida; wades in shallow water hunting mainly for apple snails (its primary food), but will also consume mussels, insects, frogs, crustaceans, etc.; aka **Carrao**, **Courlan**; flies with neck extended*; no sexual dimorphism

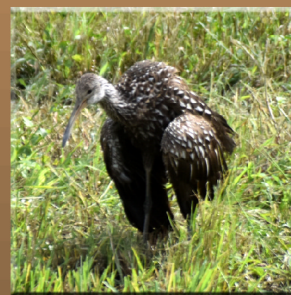
Mojave presence: no recorded sightings



Pompano Beach, Florida



Pompano Beach, Florida



Lake Okeechobee, Florida



Pompano Beach, Florida

Comment:

Though not a bird that lives in the Mojave Desert--or even visits the area by accident or during migration--I've included it here for reference; though its bill is not as curved, it can be confused with the **White-Faced Ibis** (a regular visitor the Mojave Desert) that also has an olive luster in its plumage. Compare the ibis on the left to the limpkin on the right.



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Pompano Beach, Florida

(*similar to cranes)