

Text and images extracted from

Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (editors) 1993. Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds. Volume 2, Raptors to lapwings. Melbourne, Oxford University Press. Pages 469, 486-488, 527-528.

Reproduced with the permission of BirdLife Australia.

## Order GRUIFORMES

Diverse assemblage of small to very large wading and terrestrial birds. Morphologically diverse, with few unifying characters within the Order. Anatomical details are summarized by Sibley & Ahlquist (1990). Possibly polyphyletic, though DNA comparisons indicate that the Order is monophyletic, composed of highly divergent groups that are more closely related to one another than to members of any other order (Sibley & Ahlquist 1990). The boundaries of the Order and relationships with other Orders and between families in this Order are uncertain (Sibley 1960; Sibley & Ahlquist 1972, 1990; Cracraft 1973; G.F. van Tets).

Peters, Wetmore (1960) and Storer (1971) recognized 12 families: Eurypygidae (monotypic Sun-bittern of tropical America); Otididae (bustards); Gruidae (cranes); Heliornithidae (finfoots of tropical Old and New World; three monotypic species); Aramididae (monotypic Limpkin of tropical and subtropical America); Psophiidae (trumpeters of tropical America; three species in single genus); Cariamidae (seriemas of central S. America; two monotypic genera); Rhynochetidae (monotypic Kagu of New Caledonia); Rallidae (crakes and rails); Mesitornithidae (mesites of Madagascar; three species in two genera); Pedionomidae (monotypic Plains-wanderer of Aust.); and Turnicidae (button-quails).

The Plains-wanderer is now recognized as being a charadriiform on evidence of morphology (Olson & Steadman 1981) and DNA-DNA hybridization (Sibley *et al.* 1988). Sibley *et al.* (1988) and Sibley & Ahlquist (1990) placed the Turnicidae in a separate Order, the Turniciformes *incertae sedis* (which we follow here; q.v.) and included Aramididae within the Heliornithidae but otherwise retained a similar arrangement of families. The Mesitornithidae, Rhynochetidae and Otididae have also been regarded as separate Orders.

Only Gruidae, Rallidae and Otididae occur in our region; other families are not considered further here.

### REFERENCES

- Cracraft, J. 1973. *Bull. Am. Mus. nat. Hist.* 151.
- Farner, D.S., *et al.* (Eds) 1971. *Avian Biology. 1.* Academic Press, New York.
- Olson, S.L., & D.W. Steadman. 1981. *Smithson. Contrib. Zool.* 337: 1-25.
- Sibley, C.G. 1960. *Ibis* 102: 215-29.
- , & J.E. Ahlquist. 1972. *Bull. Peabody Mus. nat. Hist.* 39: 1-276.
- , — 1990. *Phylogeny and Classification of Birds.* Yale Univ. Press, New Haven.
- , *et al.* 1988. *Auk* 105: 409-23.
- Storer, R.W. 1971. Pp 1-18 **In:** Farner *et al.* 1971.
- Wetmore, A. 1960. *Smithson. misc. Coll.* 139.

## Family RALLIDAE rails, crakes and gallinules

A group of small to medium-sized (12–65 cm long), generally slender, terrestrial birds, usually of wetlands, often very secretive and skulking. Almost cosmopolitan, not occurring in polar regions and waterless deserts. In our region, 17 breeding species in 11 genera, five accidentals (one doubtful) and three extinct. Relation to other Gruiformes not fully resolved; skeletal morphology suggests close alliance to Psophiidae (trumpeters) and Heliornithidae (sungrebes) (Cracraft 1973); Aramididae, Eurypygididae and Cariamididae of S. America, and Rhynochetidae of New Caledonia and the extinct Aptornithidae of NZ also closely related; some or all of these families could be included as sub-families in Rallidae (G.F. van Tets). DNA–DNA hybridization evidence shows Rallidae form a distinct cluster separate from cranes and their allies (Sibley & Ahlquist 1990). Olson (1973b) recognized two sub-families: the monotypic Himantornithinae and the Rallinae, with Himantornithinae intermediate between Rallinae and Psophiidae. The Jacanidae (Charadriiformes; q.v.) may be derived as aquatic specialists from *Gallinula*-like stock and more appropriately placed within the Rallidae (G.F. van Tets).

Arrangements within the Rallidae have varied: Peters recognized 52 genera; Thomson (1964), 45; Olson (1973b), 35; Ripley (1977) 17; BWP, 32–39; Campbell & Lack (1985), 18; and Sibley & Ahlquist (1990) 34 (142 species). Rallidae vary anatomically in relation to diet and habitat. Olson (1973b) suggested they evolved from terrestrial to aquatic but admits evolution may have occurred several times. For practical purposes, broad division often made into (1) rails, crakes and wood-rails, most of which are terrestrial (in HANZAB region: *Rallina*, *Gallirallus*, *Dryolimnas*, *Porzana*, *Eulabeornis*, *Crex*); and (2) coots and gallinules (including swamphens, native-hens and waterhens), which tend to be more aquatic (in HANZAB region: *Amauromis*, *Gallinula*, *Porphyrio*, *Fulica*, *Gallicrex*). The affinities of the genera and, in brackets, the number of volant and flightless species recorded in HANZAB region given below. *Rallina* (2, 0): one species occurring Aust. and New Guinea and another vagrant to Aust.; close relatives are *Canirallus* and *Sarothrura* of Africa, *Mentocrex* of Madagascar and *Rallacula* of New Guinea (Olson 1973b). *Gallirallus* (1, 4): widespread in Indo-Pacific region; one or more species of volant *Gallirallus* are thought to be ancestral to several insular species in the sw. Pacific, including *lafresnayanus* of New Caledonia and *sylvestris* of Lord Howe I. (Olson 1973b; Fullagar & Disney 1981; Schodde & de Naurois 1982; Diamond 1991). *Dryolimnas* (1, 0): one species (*pectoralis*) occurring Aust. and Auckland Is; closely related to *Gallirallus* and *Rallus*; *pectoralis* often placed in *Rallus*. *Amauromis* (1, 0): one species occurring Aust., New Guinea, Philippines and Moluccas. *Porzana* (5, 0): worldwide, with four species native to our region and one vagrant; we follow Mees (1982) by including *Poliolimnas* in *Porzana*; Olson (1973b) thought *Porzana* may have evolved from *Amauromis*. *Eulabeornis* (1, 0) endemic to n. Aust. and Aru Is, and according to Olson (1973b), an allopatric close relative of *Habroptila* (1, 1) of Wallacea and New Guinea. *Crex* (1, 0) breeds in Eurasia and migrates S, mainly to Africa; vagrant to Aust. and, doubtfully, to NZ. *Gallicrex* (1, 0): vagrant from se. Asia to Christmas I. (Ind.); may also have derived from *Amauromis*. *Gallinula* (2, 1) worldwide distribution, with three species in our area; also an *Amauromis* derivative; sub-genus *Tribonyx* is endemic to Aust. with a fossil record going back to Pliocene (Olson 1975); differ from *Gallinula* in broad bill, long tail and short toes. *Porphyrio* (2, 2) appears to be a *Gallinula* derivative, with sub-genus *Porphyryla* intermediate in shape and plumage between *Gallinula* and nominate *Porphyrio* of Africa, Asia and Aust.; the sub-genus *Notornis* of Lord Howe I. and NZ consists of obvious derivatives of the nominate, but are terrestrial with an exceptionally deep bill and short toes. *Fulica* (1, 0): worldwide distribution, with one species in our region, and two flightless extinct species in NZ; probably derived from *Gallinula*-like stock (Olson 1973b).

Bodies, short, often laterally compressed for ease of movement in dense vegetation. Neck, short or moderately long; 14–15 cervical vertebrae. Males, often slightly larger than females. Wings, short, broad, rounded; in volant species, flight appears low, weak and generally not sustained though some species capable of long-distance movements, occurring on or colonizing oceanic islands (e.g. Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica*, Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* in HANZAB region). Some island species are flightless, yet many others migrate or disperse over long distances. In HANZAB region, all species have 11 primaries (p11 minute) and 10–12 secondaries; in Family, 10–20 secondaries, smaller species have ten and some flightless species have fewer primaries (BWP); diastataxic. Short sharp curved claw on alula. Tail, short, square to rounded, soft; often raised or flicked up to signal colours of under tail-coverts; normally 12 (6–16) rectrices. Bill varies: often rather slender, straight and slightly longer than head, and in some species, slightly decurved; or quite short and laterally compressed (crakes, most gallinules, coots); or massive and laterally compressed (some species of *Porphyrio*). Gallinules and coots have smooth, plate-like horny frontal shield (continuous with ramphotheca) on forehead. Nostrils usually in large depression (not in *Porphyrio*), pervious and perforate in some species. Sense of smell said to be well developed (Ripley 1977). Legs, well developed, usually strong, long to quite short, often laterally compressed. Toes, long and slender but may be rather short and heavy; hind toe, large, slightly raised. In most gallinules (not native-hens *Gallinula*, Takahe *Porphyrio mantelli* and White Gallinule *P. alba*) and some crakes, toes greatly elongated and legs modified for walking on floating vegetation; in coots, toes have enlarged lateral lobes to aid swimming, and pelvis and legs modified for diving. All species can swim; dive easily and can sink, using wings under water if necessary. Many species climb easily among thick vegetation; downy young of some (and

possibly adults) use wing-claw to assist climbing. Oil-gland bi-lobed, feathered in most species. Caeca, long. Syrinx, simple; tracho-bronchial. Feathers, fairly loose and soft, frayed and even hair-like in some; small after-feather usual.

Plumage, generally sombre browns, chestnut, black, or greys; iridescent purplish-blue and green in *Porphyrio*. Barring on flanks common. Vent and under tail-coverts may contrast with rest of plumage. Upperparts, spotted, barred, streaked, or plain. Bare parts often brightly coloured and forehead shield conspicuous. Sexes usually similar or nearly so (except in *Sarothrura* and *Gallixrex*). Pre-breeding moults restricted or absent, with no seasonal changes in appearance (except in *Gallixrex*) but colours of bare parts change in some species, coinciding with moults. Post-breeding moult, complete. Remiges may be moulted irregularly, or simultaneously, with consequent flightless period. Post-juvenile moult partial; can be followed by partial pre-alternate moult or by complete second pre-basic. Young, downy, and unlike other precocial birds, black (sometimes iridescent) or dark brown, which may be an adaptation for hiding in dense vegetation; evidently a derived condition (Olson 1973b). In some species, downy young have brightly coloured bills or skin on head or both, which may function for signalling (Fjeldså 1977). Downy young of *Gallinula*, *Porphyrio* and *Fulica* also have white or yellow terminal bristles on down. Post-natal development slower than in some other precocial birds, such as Galliformes and Turniciformes, with initial emphasis on development of legs and feet and not wings; flight-feathers develop last. Juveniles generally similar to but duller than adults.

Numerous flightless forms; incidence of flightlessness perhaps greater than in any other group except ratites and penguins. Flightlessness has evolved many times within the Rallidae, often and repeatedly on islands without predators and probably independently each time; appears to evolve rapidly and so probably of little phylogenetic significance above the level of species (Olson 1973a). Selection reduces flight-muscle and pectoral girdle, possibly through neoteny (Olson 1973a); usually corresponding increase in development of leg muscles. Frequency of flightlessness suggests that rails are predisposed to it; they are certainly pre-adapted for coping with some of the restrictions it imposes: many volant species are behaviourally flightless, e.g. avoiding predators by running away; many are temporarily flightless during wing-moult (a feature shared with several other groups containing flightless forms), when secretive and elusive; and post-natal development of flight is slow. In many species, populations of insular flightless species exterminated by introduced predators (e.g. Chatham Island Rail *Gallirallus modestus*, Dieffenbach's Rail *Gallirallus dieffenbachi*). Subfossils from our region have been reviewed (Olson 1977) and include flightless and often large species of coot, waterhen, rail and wood-rail and the distinctive snipe-rail *Capellirallus*. For discussion of biogeography of *Gallirallus* see Olson (1973b), Fullagar *et al.* (1982), Schodde & de Naurois (1982), and Diamond (1991).

Most inhabit all sorts of terrestrial, estuarine and littoral wetlands, from sea-level to mountain highlands. Some genera found in lowland and montane forests; others in wet grasslands; still others, e.g. Takahe *Porphyrio mantelli*, *Crex*, tussock grasslands, hay-fields and similar places, not necessarily with wet areas. Some species migratory; many dispersive; others apparently sedentary. Patterns of movements in HANZAB region generally not known, perhaps because they appear to take place at night and perhaps because the birds are so secretive and silent when not breeding that absences may be more supposed than real. Gallinules and coots appear to be more sedentary than crakes and rails, though at least the Black-tailed Native-hen *Gallinula ventralis* is notably irruptive, in response to floods and droughts of inland Aust.

Omnivorous, or in some species mostly vegetarian. Species with long thin bills probe for invertebrates in soft ground and litter. Eat all sorts of plants and submerged vegetation, insects, molluscs, crustaceans, eggs and young of other birds, small fish and carrion. Some gallinules graze, e.g. Tasmanian Native-hen *Gallinula mortierii* and coots. Only *Fulica* dives for food; they and *Gallinula* will up-end. Often wash food in water.

Mostly solitary or in small groups, though densities can be very high in some wetlands; *Gallinula* (e.g. Black-tailed Native-hen *Gallinula ventralis*) and *Fulica* form large flocks, especially in winter; after onset of inland droughts, irruptions may involve thousands of birds. Roost solitarily except in species that flock; generally at night on ground in cover; occasionally in bushes and trees. Some species nocturnal or crepuscular. Most species nest solitarily; some strongly territorial, advertising territories with loud persistent calling and chasing of intruders. Dense vegetation and apparently secretive habits make it hard to study social organization and behaviour in most species. Agonistic and sexual behaviour often conspicuous with wing-spreading, tail-flicking, fighting with use of bill and feet and other ritualized features of display. Pair-bond usually monogamous and only for one season but may be sustained. Polygyny known in captivity and suspected in wild, e.g. in *C. crex*; polyandry occurs in Tasmanian Native-hen *Gallinula mortierii* and possibly Weka *Gallirallus australis*. Co-operative breeding in some gallinules, e.g. Dusky Moorhen *Gallinula tenebrosa*. Pair-formation and courtship little known except in some gallinules and coots, in which a variety of chasing, bowing, nibbling, mock-preening and feeding, and courtship feeding takes place; no elaborate ceremonies at time of nest-relief. Copulation and other activities take place out of water or on specially built platforms. Most species very vocal, with screams, trills, whistles, booms, rattles, trumpets, grunts or barks; can be ventriloquial; mostly silent when not breeding but social species have loud rallying cries. Stand at rest (sometimes on one leg) in hunched posture with head sunk on shoulders, or lie down; sleep with head on back and bill among feathers. Bathe in shallow water, alternately ducking head in water and flipping water over back or by beating half-open wings in water; coots may bathe while swimming. Leave water to oil and preen after bathing. Sun themselves after preening. Allopeening common. Scratch head directly. Some species (e.g. *Porphyrio porphyrio*, *P. alba*, *P. mantelli*) recorded manipulating and grasping food in foot or holding down large items with feet.

Breed seasonally and protractedly. Nest fairly deep and cup-shaped; in some rails, domed; in wetlands, often with ramps up to nests. In thick vegetation, often near or on surface of water but some species nest high in trees; use old nests of other birds or nest on ground far from water; materials from any available plants; built by both sexes. Horned Coot *F. cornuta* of S. America builds islands of small stones. Some build nests that float or are attached to aquatic vegetation; nests on water may be built up rapidly if water-level rises. Non-functional nests often found in gallinules and *Gallinula*, which also build nursery nests after young hatch. Eggs, blunt oval; smooth and fairly glossy; dull white to tan ground-colour, blotched and spotted red-brown to black; unspotted in *Rallina*. Clutch-size, 5–10 (1–18) but dump-laying or laying by more than one female in same nest may complicate estimation of size of clutch laid by an individual. Usually one or two broods and replacement layings up to three times. Lay at intervals of 24 or 48 h. Incubation usually by both sexes but in some by female alone or with only small share by male. Incubation period, 14–24 days per egg; start of incubation varies from first to last egg and so hatching synchronic or asynchronic. Egg-shells left in nest or removed. Generally have two large lateral and one small median brood-patches. Young hatch in down, precocial, nidifugous; at first fed bill to bill, becoming self-feeding within few days or not until 8 weeks old. Normally tended by both parents and, in a few species, offspring of previous broods may help to feed young, e.g. *Gallinula*, occasionally *Porphyrio*. Fledging period, 30–60 days (20–70) and then independent except in co-operative breeders. First breeding usually when 1 year old or less.

#### REFERENCES

- Campbell, B., & E. Lack. 1985. *A Dictionary of Birds*. Poyser, Calton.
- Cracraft, J. 1973. *Bull. Am. Mus. nat. Hist.* 151.
- Diamond, J. 1991. *Auk* 108: 461–70.
- Fjeldså, J. 1977. *Guide to the Young of European Precocial Birds*. Skarv. Nature Publs, Strandgården, Tisvildileje.
- Fullagar, P.J., et al. 1982. *Emu* 82: 131–6.
- Mees, G.F. 1982. *Zool. Verh., Leiden* 191.
- Olson, S.L. 1973a. *Smithson. Contr. Zool.* 152.
- 1973b. *Wilson Bull.* 85: 381–416.
- 1977. Pp 339–73 **In:** Ripley 1977.
- Ripley, S.D. 1977. *Rails of the World*. Fehely, Toronto.
- Schodde, R., & R. de Naurois. 1982. *Notornis* 29: 131–42.
- Sibley, C.G., & J.E. Ahlquist. 1990. *Phylogeny and Classification of Birds*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven.
- Thomson, A.L. (Ed.) 1964. *A New Dictionary of Birds*. Nelson, Lond.

[*Gallirallus modestus* Chatham Island Rail]

*Rallus modestus* Hutton, 1872, *Ibis* 3 (2): 247 — Mangere Island, Chatham Islands.

*Modestus* is Latin for 'retiring', 'plain' or 'unassuming'.

MONOTYPIC

Extinct and little known. Small mostly brown rail, c. 18 cm in length, formerly found on Mangere, Pitt and Chatham Is in Chatham Arch. First discovered on Mangere I. in 1871 (Oliver). Extinct on Chatham I. since early nineteenth century, on Pitt I. since later in nineteenth century, and on Mangere I. since 1896–1900 (Ripley 1977; Oliver). Introduction of cats and rats (Ripley 1977), destruction of habitat, and possibly excessive collecting for profit (Oliver) caused extinction. Twenty-six museum specimens collected from Mangere I. alone (Ripley 1977). Strictly nocturnal; stomach contained legs and elytra of beetles (Coleoptera) (Buller 1905); observed feeding on 'sand-hoppers' (Amphipoda) in forest. Nested in holes in ground and young hid in fallen hollow trees (Forbes 1893). Egg, nearly white with faint double spotting of grey and rufous: 36.8 mm x 27.9 mm (Hutton 1874). Dependent nestling collected 5 Jan. (Hutton 1873).

**PLUMAGES** Prepared by R.P.Scofield.

**Adult** Ground-colour, brown (119B) with mantle and upperback, brown (121B). **Head and neck** Forehead, crown, nape,

cheeks and upper ear-coverts, brown (121B). Lower ear-coverts, chin, throat and upper breast, brown (119B). **Upperparts** Brown (121B), grading into brown (219B) lower back. **Uppertail** Brown (219B). **Undertail** Dark brown (121) broadly barred with buff-yellow (53). **Upperwing** Brown (37) with indistinct, broken pink-buff (121D) barring on primary coverts and outer two primaries. **Underparts** Breast, brown (219B) becoming light grey-brown (27) on belly, vent and flanks, with narrow buff-yellow (53) barring throughout, most distinct on sides of breast and flanks. **Underwing** Remiges, dark brown (121A), with indistinct brown (121C) barring and spotting on outer edges of two outer primaries, as on upper surface. Shafts, buff (124). Coverts, dusky.

**Immature** Said to be as adult (Forbes 1893).

**BARE PARTS** No data on labels. Buller (1888) said bill, iris and feet, light brown, though later (1905) said bill and feet, uniform dark brown.

**MEASUREMENTS** (1) One male, one female, one unsexed, measurements combined (type lost or unlabelled) (BMNH, P. Scofield); (2) one male (AWMM, R.P. Scofield).

	1	2
WING	84 (76–92; 3)	85.6
TAIL	31.5 (29.0–34.0; 3)	32.0
BILL F	31.0 (28.7–33.2; 3)	—
BILL W	4.8 (3.4–5.7; 3)	5.3
BILL D	7.3 (6.5–7.8; 3)	7.5
TARSUS	32.7 (31.4–35.1; 3)	34.1
TOE	28.7 (27.0–31.6; 3)	26.1
TOE C	35.5 (34.1–37.5; 3)	32.9

**STRUCTURE** Flightless; wing, stunted, rounded; p7 longest; p8, p9 and p10 progressively shorter. Small spur on carpal. Bill, narrow and down-curved toward tip. Nares, large and oval. Hind-toe, long, with small nail. Tail, reduced and hidden by coverts.

**GEOGRAPHICAL VARIATION** No apparent variation in bones from the three islands on which it occurred (P. Milliner). When first collected, believed to be the immature of *G. dieffenbachii* (Buller 1888); Hutton (1873) showed major structural, osteological and behavioural evidence against this. For further discussion, see Olson (1973, 1975). Distantly related to *G. philippensis* and believed to represent an earlier invasion than *G. dieffenbachii* (Olsen 1975).

#### REFERENCES

- Buller, W.L. 1888. *History of the Birds of New Zealand*. Author, Lond.  
 — 1905. *Supplement to the History of the Birds of New Zealand*. Author, Lond.  
 Forbes, H.O. 1893. *Ibis* (6) 5: 521–46.  
 Hutton, F.W. 1873. *Ibis* (3) 3: 349–52.  
 — 1874. *Trans. NZ Inst.* 6: 108–10.  
 Olson, S.L. 1973. *Wilson Bull.* 85: 381–416.  
 — 1975. *Rec. Nat. Mus. NZ* 1: 63–79.  
 Ripley, S.D. 1977. *Rails of the World*. Feheley, Toronto.