

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
THE RESOURCES AGENCY  
Department of Fish and Game

SURVEY OF YUMA CLAPPER RAILS AND CALIFORNIA  
BLACK RAILS ALONG COACHELLA CANAL,  
IMPERIAL COUNTY, MAY 1975

RONALD M. JUREK  
Nongame Wildlife Investigations

**SUMMARY**

An interagency team of biologists using tape recorded rail calls located twenty California black rails (*Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus*) and one Yuma clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*) in marshes along Coachella Canal during the survey period May 12 to 16, 1975. Survey area included all marsh and riparian habitats between Coachella Canal and Highline Canal from All American Canal to Beal Road. All rails were found in the northwestern one-third of the study area from the vicinity of Titsworth Road to Flowing Well Road.

**INTRODUCTION**

In a survey conducted by California Department of Fish and Game in October 1974, 5 Yuma clapper rails and 26 California black rails were recorded on transects in the Coachella Canal Study Area. A description of these marshes and their wildlife importance is documented as a result of this survey (California Department of Fish and Game, 1974). In addition, a vegetation survey of these marshes was conducted from September 17 to November 1, 1974 (U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, 1974).

A follow-up survey was conducted in May 1975 to determine the importance of this area to these rails during the breeding season. A six member interagency team of biologists conducted the survey. Survey participants were Ron Powell, Gordon Gould and Ron Jurek of California Department of Fish and Game; Bob Folker of Fish and Wildlife Service; and Bob Christensen and Bob Hoffman of Bureau of Reclamation.

**METHODS**

Tape recorded rail calls were broadcasted in suitable marsh habitats in an effort to elicit call responses. Tapes were played on portable cassette players. Frequently, calls were amplified over power horns connected to the recorders. Each team of two censusers walked or drove along the edges of marshes or walked through marsh areas, stopping periodically to play recordings and to listen for responses. Surveys were conducted within the periods of about 0600 to 0930 in mornings and from about 1830 to 2030 in evenings.

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June 6, 1975

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Approximately 75 man-hours were expended in searching for rails in the study area. Responses were heard from 20 black rails and 1 clapper rail (Table 1 and Figure 1).

The southernmost area along Coachella Canal that black rails were located was a marsh 1.6 km (1 mile) south of Titsworth Road. The birds were fairly evenly distributed in marshes northward as far as the vicinity of Siphon #5. Black rails were located in eight marsh units. All but two of the birds were found in the portion of the study area between Coachella Canal and the high shoreline of ancient Lake Coahuila.

Black rails were noticeably absent from three adjacent marshes near Siphon #3. These areas contained extensive stands of cattails and other wetland vegetation, but there was little surface water. These marshes were drier than other areas where rails were found, and the soil was characteristically salt encrusted.

Most black rails responded well to broadcasted calls during early morning (0700 to 0900) and late afternoon (1850 to 2015). Most responses were the "kic-kic-kic-kerr" and "grrr" calls.

Black rails apparently were in well established breeding territories, based on the intensity of responses and wide distribution of birds over the study area. Six of the black rails were easily relocated one or two days later in the same places where they were first discovered, further indicating that these were breeding birds.

Only one Yuma clapper rail responded to recordings. This bird was in a cattail marsh below Siphon #2. It was quite unresponsive, giving only two short clatter responses about 15 minutes apart. Additional responses could not be elicited despite continuing efforts during the morning it was found and, again, two mornings later;

While playing a clapper rail tape the evening of May 14 in a marsh below Siphon #4, censusers heard a "keking" response that may have come from another clapper rail; however, the censusers were not familiar enough with the response to be certain of which species of rail was making this call. This call also was of short duration, and censusers failed to relocate this bird two days later.

The weak responses by the clapper rail (or rails) to taped calls indicate that it is unlikely that any clapper rails were breeding in the study area during the survey period.

## LITERATURE CITED

- California Department of Fish and Game. 1974. Inventory of the fish and wildlife resources, recreational consumptive use, and habitat in and adjacent to the upper 49 miles and ponded areas of the Coachella Canal. (November 15, 1974).
- U. S. Bureau of Reclamation. 1974. Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Projects, Title 1, Coachella Canal Unit, California-Vegetation Inventory. Yuma Projects Office, Yuma, Arizona. (November 1974, preliminary report).

TABLE 1

## COACHELLA CANAL RAIL SURVEY, MAY 1975

BLACK RAILS

Date	Time	No. of Rails Responding	Type of Response <sup>1/</sup>	Location <sup>2/</sup>	Habitat Type	Persons Conducting Survey
5-12	1945-2015	3	(1)	Area 4R-3, West side of Coachella Canal 1 mi. south of Titsworth Rd.	Cattail	Jurek-Powell
5-13	0702 and 0810	1 <sup>3/</sup>	(1)	Area 6R under powerline between 7th and 8th poles west of Coachella Canal	Cattail	Jurek
5-13	0805	1	(2) and (3)	Area 6R-1 east of main pond	Cattail	Powell
5-13	0800-0900	2	(2) and (4)	Mammoth Wash (Area 8R-1)	New growth of cattails after burn	Christensen-Folker
5-13	1955	1	(1)	Area 9R, marsh just south of Montgomery Rd.	Cattails (?)	Gould-Powell
5-13	1900	1	(1)	East side of Haley Rd. in South arm of 10R	Cattail-Phragmites	Christensen-Hoffman
5-13	2020	1	(4)	East side of Haley Rd. in north arm of 10R	Cattail-Phragmites	Christensen-Hoffman
5-13	1915-1930	2	(1) and (2)	Below old beachline in area 11R near access road through marsh	Cattail	Jurek-Folker
5-14	1850-1945	5	(1) and (2)	Marsh below Siphon #4 (Area 16R)	Cattail (lush, green vegetation; wet marsh)	Jurek-Gould
5-14	1910		(4)	Area 17R-1, upper end of marsh in wash, north side of Siphon #5	Ravennae	Christensen-Hoffman
5-15	0820	1	(4)	Area 6R-1 near 4th power pole west of Coachella Canal	Cattail	Christensen-Hoffman

CLAPPER RAILS 4/

5-14	0720	1	(6)	Marsh below Siphon #2 (Area 12R-1)	Cattail	Jurek-Folker
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1/ Responses: (1) kic-kic-kerr  
(2) kic-kic-kic-kerr  
(3) kic-kic=kic-kic-kerr  
(4) grrr  
(5) yelp  
(6) descending, bouncing clatter call

2/ Area numbers taken from Bureau of Reclamations "Coachella Canal Vegetation Inventory, Location Map," (November 1974)

3/ This same black rail was located by Christensen and Hoffman at 0630 on 5/15 in same location. It gave responses (1) and (5).

4/ Possible clapper rail response heard by Jurek and Gould:  
Short series of soft "keks" were heard in response to broadcasted clapper rail calls in Area 16R west of railroad tracks and road through marsh. Responses were heard at 1850 on 5-14. Habitat: cattails.

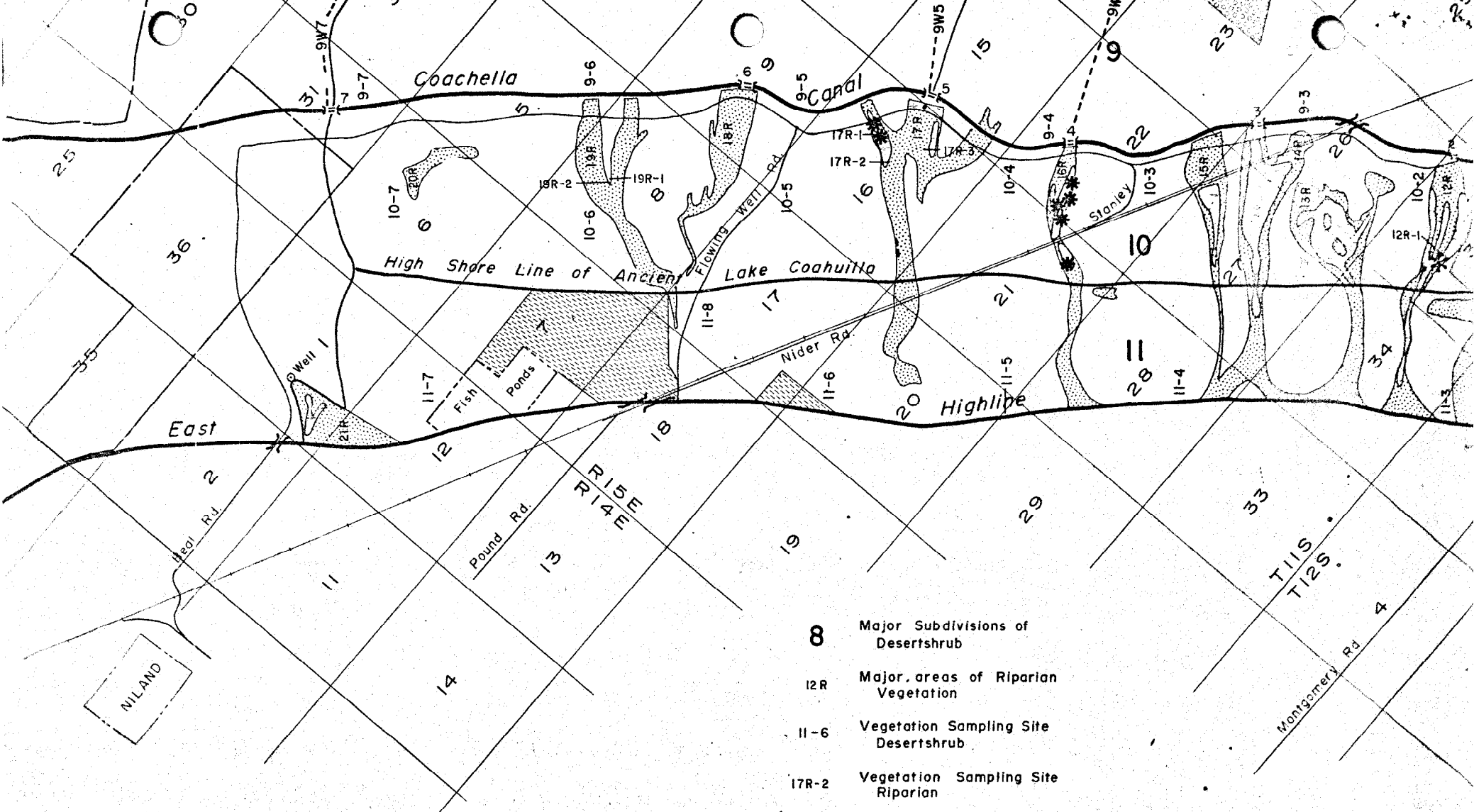
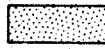

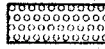




FIGURE 1

Location Map of California Black Rail and  
 Yuma Clapper Rail Call Responses,  
 Coachella Canal Study Area, May 1975

- 8 Major Subdivisions of Desertshrub
- 12R Major areas of Riparian Vegetation
- 11-6 Vegetation Sampling Site Desertshrub
- 17R-2 Vegetation Sampling Site Riparian
- 9W5 Vegetation Sampling Site Desert Wash
-  Mixed Riparian Phreatophytes
-  Marsh Hydrophytes
-  Citrus
-  Fallow Land
-  Open Water

- MAY 1975 SURVEY
- \* Black Rail
  - \* Clapper Rail

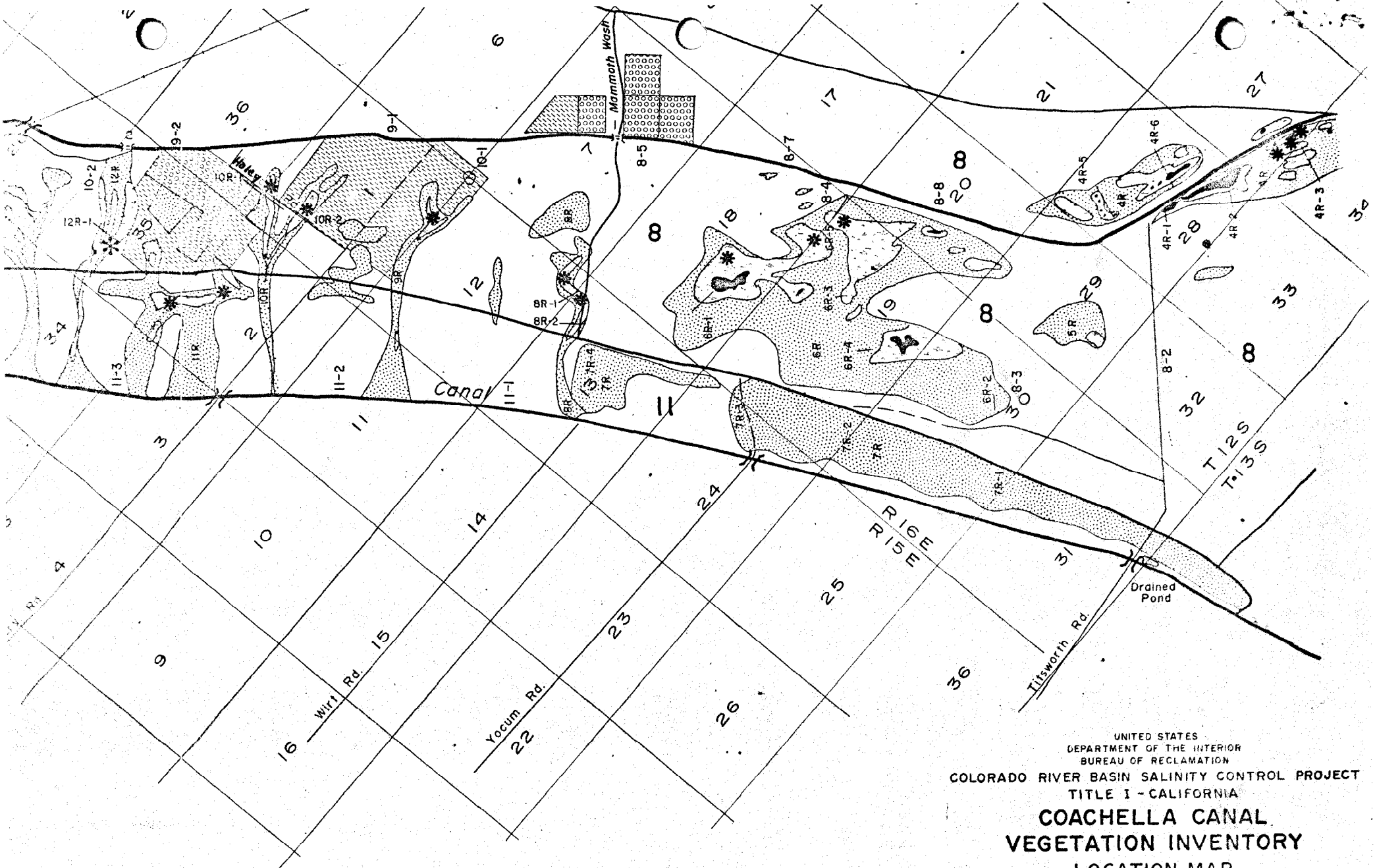


FIGURE 1 (Continued)

UNITED STATES  
 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
 COLORADO RIVER BASIN SALINITY CONTROL PROJECT  
 TITLE I - CALIFORNIA  
**COACHELLA CANAL**  
**VEGETATION INVENTORY**  
 LOCATION MAP  
 Dwg. No. 1292-303-2010  
 NOVEMBER 1974

