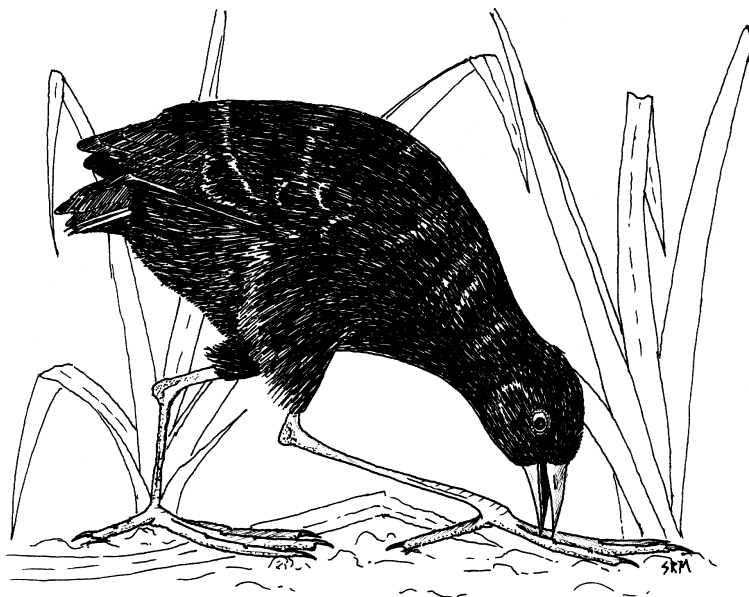




Black Crake

Swartriethaan

Amaurornis flavirostris

The commonest and most widespread crake in Africa, the Black Crake is found throughout most of the continent, from the northern edge of the Sahel to the Cape Province, and from sea-level to 3000 m (Urban *et al.* 1986). In some areas, its population density may be extremely high (e.g. Pitman 1929). In southern Africa it is common to abundant in suitable habitats, but it is localized and rare or absent in the dry western and central regions (Urban *et al.* 1986; Earlé & Grobler 1987; Maclean 1993b). Atlas data extend its known range to southern Namibia and the dry central and northern regions of the Cape Province, especially along the course of the Orange River. Its occurrences are relatively well documented because, compared with other terrestrial wetland rallids, it is less secretive and has a better-known advertising call.

Habitat: It frequents freshwater and estuarine wetland vegetation and occupies many wetland types, its normal requirements including moderate cover and some permanent flooding. It inhabits rank grass, sedges, reedbeds, papyrus, swampy thickets, bushes and other vegetation beside flowing, still or open waters; it likes tangled growth in which it climbs, roosts and may nest (Snow 1978; Hopkinson & Masterson 1984; Urban *et al.* 1986). It often feeds amongst floating vegetation and along open shorelines, even venturing into short grass or cultivation some distance from cover (Taylor 1994). It is an adaptable species; in dry regions it will occupy tiny streams with thin cover and it is moderately tolerant of human disturbance (Urban *et al.* 1986; pers. obs).

The vegetation analysis indicates the existence of much suitable habitat in the Okavango, and it is known to occur at high densities in emergent vegetation in irregularly flooded river systems (Jackson & Sclater 1938). In KwaZulu-Natal it is most widespread and numerous below 1200 m and is rarely recorded above 1800 m (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Taylor 1994).

Movements: Although largely sedentary, in the drier northernmost parts of its range it is locally migratory, appearing with the rains and disappearing in the dry season. In Zimbabwe it moves when habitats dry out, while

in East Africa and northeastern Namibia it occupies temporary wetlands (Irwin 1981; Hopkinson & Masterson 1984; Urban *et al.* 1986; Hines 1993). Fluctuating reporting rates from Zones 1 and 5–7 may be explained by greater conspicuousness during the winter months when breeding territories are relinquished and birds feed more often in the open, and/or by seasonal variations in calling frequency (Taylor 1994).

Breeding: It is multiple-brooded, offspring of previous broods often helping to rear the chicks of subsequent breeding attempts (Urban *et al.* 1986; pers. obs). Under suitable conditions, breeding may occur throughout the year but in most regions there are seasonal peaks. In southern Africa these occur in November and January–March (Schmitt 1975; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Some models show peaks in April–May, probably because the analysis includes fledglings.

Interspecific relationships: This crake is widely sympatric with the larger African Rail *Rallus caerulescens*, but tolerates a wider range of habitat types, has different foraging methods, and in KwaZulu-Natal is more widespread and numerous at low altitudes and scarcer at high altitudes (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Urban *et al.* 1986; Taylor 1994).

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence for any recent change in the overall distribution. Although the Black Crake must have been affected by the continual loss of wetland habitats, it is under no immediate threat. It readily occupies artificially created wetlands and temporary waters (Urban *et al.* 1986; Taylor 1994).

P.B. Taylor

Recorded in 968 grid cells, 21.3%

Total number of records: 13 448

Mean reporting rate for range: 14.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

