

BAYLANDS

Nature Notes

Black Rail

The Black Rail is a tiny rail, 5 to 6 inches long. The adult is black with white speckles on its back and tinges of rusty brown on the back of the neck. The eyes are red, the bill and legs are black or dark gray.

The Black Rail is so secretive that it is rarely seen. Here at the Palo Alto Baylands occasional sightings have been made of this bird in the winter months during high tides. The Black Rail is more commonly heard one or two hours before sunrise or sunset. The male's call is described as being a series of metallic "kik" or "kuk" notes. The female call is a "who-who-who" all in one pitch.

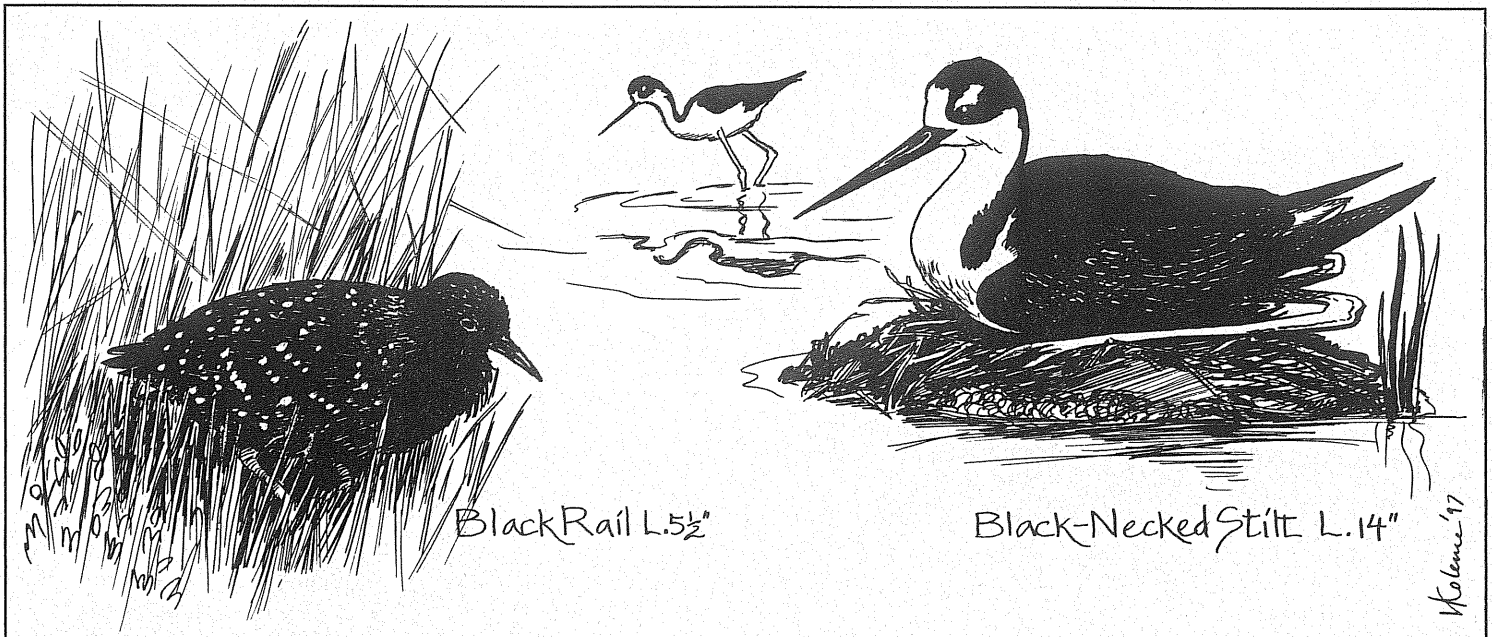
Nests are built along the edge of a marsh or tidal creek. Fashioned as a loose cup of soft grass, they are hidden under arching green marsh grasses. Here the hen and chicks are safe from the eyes of flying predators. There are no records of Black Rail nests here at the Palo Alto Baylands.

Black-Necked Stilt

This elegant long legged, black and white bird is a common sight at the Palo Alto Baylands. Even though the 8 to 10 inch long legs seem to give it unusual proportions for its body, it makes its way quite gracefully through the shallow waters and mud flats. The long needle-like bill is especially suited for finding the snails, insect larvae, crayfish and small fish which make up its diet.

The Black-Necked Stilt usually nests in small colonies in marshy areas. Nests are built with little sticks, sometimes on a mud island or in a depression on the ground. Both parents share the incubation duties. The chicks leave the nest soon after they are hatched since they are precocial. This means that they hatch with feathers and are able to move around and feed themselves.

Written and Illustrated by Virginia Kolence



Black Rail L. 5½"

Black-Necked Stilt L. 14"