

Field assistant for yellow rail study at Seney NWR, Michigan

Project description: The yellow rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) is a rare, secretive species associated with shallowly flooded wetlands, most commonly sedge meadows. Knowledge about its population status in most areas, its basic ecology, and its response to habitat management is limited. This study examines factors influencing the distribution and abundance of yellow rails and associated bird species in sedge meadows, and the response of these birds and vegetation to prescribed burning. The objectives of the study are to 1) describe occurrence and distribution of yellow rails at Seney NWR and relate to habitat characteristics; 2) describe occurrence and distribution of Le Conte's sparrow, sedge wrens, and other birds at Seney NWR and relate to habitat characteristics; and 3) evaluate effects of prescribed burning and hydrology on plant community, cover, and structure at Seney NWR.

Work period: 4 May to 28 August 2008 (total 765 hrs) Availability for early start is important

Type of services required: One individual is needed to assist with nocturnal surveys for yellow rails and other wetland birds, collection of habitat data on survey points, and collection of data on plant community and structure in sedge-shrub habitat. The individual will be supervised by a crew leader and will be expected to collect field data and enter data into spreadsheets. During field work, the individual will often work independently and thus must be highly self-motivated, understanding of the value of accurate and complete data, and able to navigate by map, compass, and GPS. The individual will periodically work with refuge staff and volunteers.

Field work.—All field work will be conducted at Seney National Wildlife Refuge. The individual will conduct nocturnal bird surveys individually or as part of a group, and assist with collection of vegetation data. A GPS unit will be provided to assist with navigation and data collection. If the individual has completed required prescribed fire training courses, has a Red Card, and passes the appropriate physical test, the individual may also collect fire behavior data during prescribed burns conducted by refuge staff.

For any activity associated with prescribed burning, the individual will be provided with the necessary safety equipment by the refuge and will operate under the direction of the Fire Management Officer.

Data work.—Data will be entered on laptop computers using Excel software.

Required skills and experience.—The individual will need at least 2 years of college coursework in wildlife, natural resources, botany, or related field. The individual must currently be a student or have been a student within the past 12 months, as of 1 May 2008. The individual should demonstrate skills and experience in collecting accurate and complete data under field conditions and ability to work independently in remote field conditions (including at night). Good to excellent hearing is required for surveys. Experience with bird surveys is desirable. The individual should also have experience in driving 4WD vehicles and using computers (specifically Windows operating system, Excel, and Word).

Experience and ability in plant taxonomy for identifying sedge-bog vegetation to species, and CPR and first aid skills a plus. Must have a valid driver's license for operation of federal vehicle.

Working conditions.— Most work will be performed outdoors. Field work will be conducted in sedge-shrub-bog wetlands in Seney National Wildlife Refuge. Access to general areas is by 2- and 4-wheel drive vehicles on refuge gravel roads; however, direct access to most surveyed areas requires hiking long distances on uneven, soft, and often flooded ground, often at night. Field work therefore requires very good physical condition, ability to walk long distances (>5 km daily) on difficult substrates, good field sense, and good navigational abilities. The individual will be required to carry equipment weighing up to 20 pounds. Field work will involve exposure to a wide range of weather conditions including cold, snow, water, mud, and severe heat. Exposure to biting insects (black flies, mosquitoes, and deer and horse flies) is high. Work periodically during the season will be on computers in an office setting.

Compensation.—Compensation is commensurate with the level of education and experience required; for an individual who has completed at least 2 years of college coursework, the estimated rate is \$13.62/hour. This rate includes an amount for self-employment taxes. The individual is expected to work, on average, a 40–45 hour week, but some weeks may require longer hours. Although pay will cover all hours worked, the individual will not receive a premium rate for work beyond 8 hours/day or 40

hours/week. If any travel related to work occurs, travel costs will be compensated as would be done for federal employees. The individual also will be eligible for Workers Compensation at government expense the same as a federal employee. The individual is responsible for all costs of other transportation to and from Seney and for personal transportation at the study area; a federal vehicle will be provided for transportation around the study area. Housing is available on the refuge. The Government does not provide meals or other living expenses.

Duty stations.—The individual will be stationed at Seney, Michigan for work on the Seney National Wildlife Refuge.

Please send, electronically a complete resume and list of references; please send electronically or via surface mail a copy of transcripts and, if completed, proof of college diploma (copies ok) to:

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