

**University of California, Berkeley, Richmond Field Station
Clapper Rail Conservation Program**

Prohibition on Feeding Free-Roaming Cats (May 2008)

The University of California, Berkeley's Richmond Field Station (RFS) is home to a rare local species known as the California clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris obsoletus*). This once abundant bird, which is hen-like in appearance, lives in tidal salt marshes and has suffered from hunting, habitat loss, and predation from free-roaming (feral) cats, rats, and other predators. Only around 1,000 individual birds remain and they are now protected by the federal and state Endangered Species Acts.

Since 1999, the University has investigated and worked to remediate a large area of legacy industrial wastes deposited by prior shoreline property owners into Stege Marsh, the home of the clapper rail. As part of the process we have consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies to design a wetland program that will increase and enhance the habitat of the clapper rail.



As part of the marsh restoration, the University is implementing a feral animal management program designed to help reduce the impacts on the clapper rail from predators such as free-ranging feral cats, raccoons, and skunks. The program includes creating more habitat, educational outreach, and active predator management, including reducing access to shelter and food near rail habitat, and trapping.

Since the feral animal management program was implemented in 2004, it has become evident that a major source of predator pressure comes from the feeding of wild, free-roaming domestic cats (*Felis catus*) at the RFS*. Feeding of cats not only increases the population of cats but also raccoons, skunks, and other predators that become use to the free, readily available food. Therefore, the University has decided to prohibit further feeding of feral cats and other animals throughout the RFS, as follows:

**Beginning June 1, 2008: It is prohibited to feed or otherwise care
for free-roaming cats or other animals at the RFS.**

* Notes - Besides the threat to the California clapper rail, feeding feral cats impacts other bird species. It is estimated that the 100 million domestic and free-roaming cats in the United States kill hundreds of millions of birds annually (Coleman, J.S., Temple S.A., and Craven, S.R. 1999). The domestic cat is listed as one of the 100 world's worst invasive alien species by the World Conservation Union (www.issg.org/database) due to the predatory pressure they exert on native populations. For more information on feral domestic cats, go to the California Department of Fish and Game website at: http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/species/nuis_exo/dom_cat/index.html

For more information on the UC Berkeley RFS California clapper rail conservation program, go to the Restoration Page of the RFS Environmental Website, <http://rfs.berkeley.edu>.