Status of the Black Rail and the Gray-breasted Crake in British Honduras.—In 1963 I obtained two Black Rails (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) 17 miles northwest of Monkey River, British Honduras. A male was collected on 29 June; it weighed 35.0 gm and its testes measured 2 × 4 and 2 × 3 mm. The following day a female was taken; it weighed 39.9 gm and had large ova (9 × 10 and 7 × 7 mm). The female was unquestionably in breeding condition. There are no published records of nesting Black Rails in México (excluding Baja California) or Central America.

Black Rails inhabited at least a portion of several square miles of open savanna at an elevation of 100 feet between Deep River and Bladen Branch of the Monkey River. Although the high and low sections of the savanna where rails were found differ in elevation by six feet, the area is poorly drained. The average annual rainfall is over 140 inches. During much of the year the savanna is very wet, but the months of February through May are usually rather dry. In 1963 rains did not begin until late June, and at the time the Black Rails were collected there was no standing water in the savanna. The grasses *Sporobolus cubensis, Paspalum pulchellum,* and *Mesosetum filifolium* and the sedges *Rhynchospora globosa, R. barbata,* and *R. cyperoides* predominated in the savanna. Most grasses and sedges were from 10 to 20 inches tall. A few chaparro (*Curatella americana*) and nanze (*Byrsonima crassifolia*) were widely scattered in the area. Oaks (*Quercus oleoides*) occasionally formed clusters not exceeding a height of 30 inches. Pines (*Pinus caribea*) surrounded the open savanna.

The Black Rails were difficult to flush in the knee-high savanna vegetation and were not seen except when they flew. They frequently uttered a rapid *peep-peep* followed immediately by a low, almost guttural *churrr.* My imitation of this call would often be followed by an answer from a hidden bird a few feet from me. Another call consisted of a low clucking note. I do not know if one or both sexes made the calls. In a mapped study area of 21.6 acres divided into 12 quadrats of 1.8 acres, I recorded at least 10 Black Rails in 7 of the quadrats in the course of 12 hours of observations. My assistant, Angelo Palmisano, spent many hours traversing the savanna in attempts to flush the rails, and it was by this technique that he collected the two birds. The Ruddy Crake (*Laterallus ruber*) was common in the brushy thickets at the edge of the savanna, but it never entered the open regions frequented by the Black Rails. Short-billed Marsh Wrens (*Cistothorus platensis*) were the most common birds in the savanna. Grasshopper Sparrows (*Ammodramus savannarum*) and Botteri Sparrows (*Aimophila botteri*) were also residents, but they preferred higher parts of the savanna.

The American Ornithologists' Union Check-list (5th ed., 1957:158) lists two North American races of the Black Rail: *L. j. jamaicensis* in the eastern part of the United States and *L. j. coturniculus* on the Pacific coast south to northern Baja California. In an effort to identify the subspecies of the British Honduran specimens, I examined 13 males and eight females of *L. j. jamaicensis* and 18 males and 17 females of *L. j. coturniculus.* Friedmann (Birds of North and Middle America, Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus. 50 pt. 9, 1941:153–160) considered the sexes similar in appearance. In the series that I examined, most females were lighter on the throat and upper breast than were the males. On the basis of this character, 2 of 32 specimens labeled as males could be mistaken as females and 4 of 26 of the females resembled males. Males and females are not significantly different in size (table 1 and fig. 1).

Friedmann (*op. cit.*) compared *L. j. jamaicensis* with *L. j. coturniculus* and stated that the latter is smaller, has a more slender bill, is more deeply colored below, and has the brown of the upper parts more rufescent and more extensive. I found the color characteristics to be poorly defined when specimens of similar museum age were compared. However, slight color differences between the races do exist and can be recognized when series are compared. I could match the British Honduran birds with some specimens of each subspecies on the basis of color characters. Measurements (table 1) do indicate that *L. j. coturniculus* has a smaller wing and, to a lesser ex-

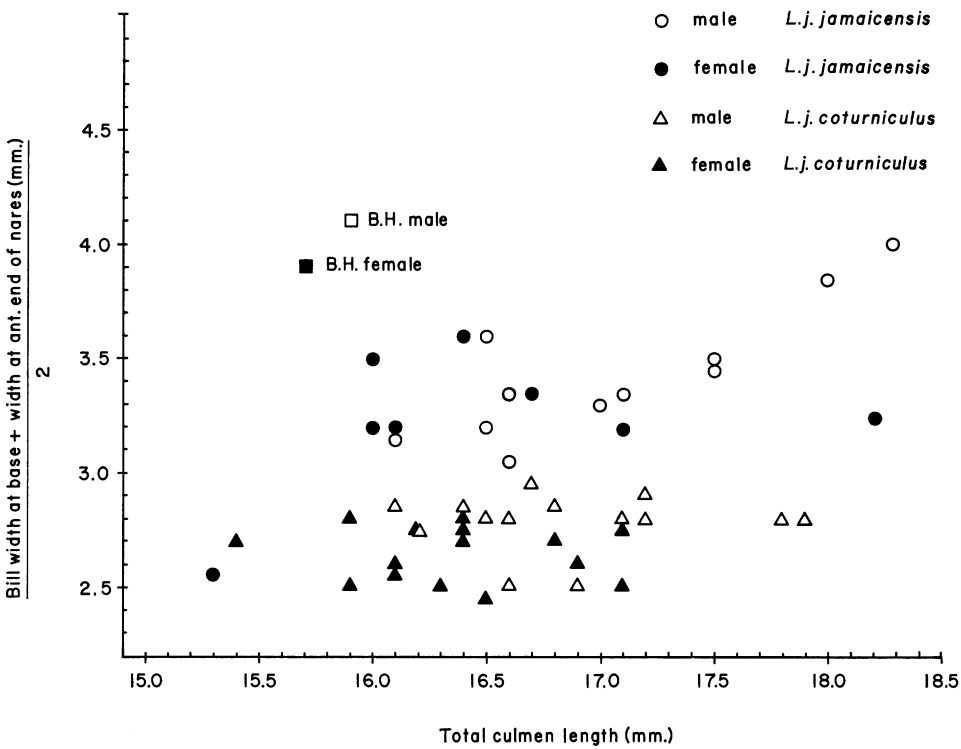

Figure 1. Relation of culmen length to bill width in North American Black Rails.

tent, a shorter tarsus than *L. j. jamaicensis*. The bill of the western race is definitely more slender and represents the most distinctive character of the race (fig. 1).

Measurements of the two birds from British Honduras are also included in the table and figure. Measurements of wing and tarsus are intermediate between the two races. In figure 1 it may be noted that the bills of the two birds from British Honduras are shorter and stouter than the bills of the other specimens. I refer the British Honduran birds to *L. j. jamaicensis*. Although they are separable from both *L. j. jamaicensis* and *L. j. coturniculus* on the basis of bill proportions, the two specimens constitute too small a sample to justify naming a new subspecies.

On 20 March 1964, Walter P. Nickell of the Cranbrook Institute of Science captured a male Gray-breasted Crake (*Laterallus exilis*) in a mist net at Middlesex, British Honduras. He placed the bird in a plastic bag and kept it frozen in dry ice until he brought it to me upon his return from British Honduras in April. The bird then weighed 27.6 gm. The testes measured 4 × 7.5 and 3 × 6 mm and the bird was probably in breeding condition. Nickell had been netting birds at several localities near Middlesex, and he captured this bird in tall grass in a wet area near a citrus grove. A small permanent stream flowed through the area. On a number of occasions, he trapped and banded *Laterallus ruber* in a similar habitat about one quarter mile away. The specimen of the Gray-breasted Crake represents the most northern locality of record for this monotypic species; previously it has not been found north of Honduras. Nickell did not hear calls attributable to this species.

My work in British Honduras in the summer of 1963 was supported in part by the Louisiana State University Museum of Zoology and by a Sigma Xi—RESA Grant-in-aid of Research. British Honduran specimens of *Laterallus* cited in this paper are deposited in the Louisiana State University Museum of Zoology. For the loan of specimens, I wish to thank the curators of the bird

TABLE 1

MEASUREMENTS OF *Laterallus jamaicensis* IN MILLIMETERS

	Sample size	Wing chord	Tail	Tarsus	Middle toe with claw
Males					
L. j. jamaicensis	13	70.0–78.0*	29.0–36.0	21.5–25.2	25.8–28.8
		73.8 ± 2.1†	33.1 ± 1.7	22.9 ± 1.0	27.4 ± 1.0
British Honduras bird		70.0	31.0	22.0	26.7
L. j. coturniculus	18	65.0–71.5	29.0–34.0	19.0–21.8	25.1–28.6
		67.6 ± 1.9	31.9 ± 1.4	20.7 ± 0.8	26.2 ± 1.0
Females					
L. j. jamaicensis	8	70.5–76.0	31.0–36.0	21.0–23.5	24.5–28.0
		73.4 ± 1.9	33.1 ± 1.6	22.4 ± 0.8	26.5 ± 1.0
British Honduras bird		71.0	35.0	21.0	27.6
L. j. coturniculus	17	63.5–69.0	28.0–34.0	19.0–21.0	23.4–27.3
		66.5 ± 1.5	30.6 ± 1.7	20.0 ± 0.6	25.2 ± 1.1

* range.
† mean and standard deviation.

collections at the American Museum of Natural History, Cornell University, University of Kansas, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Philadelphia Academy of Sciences, University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, and the United States National Museum. Jason R. Swallen and Velva E. Rudd of the United States National Museum identified plant specimens for me.—STEPHEN M. RUSSELL, *Department of Zoology, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, 9 April 1965.*