

THE STATUS OF RALLUS ELEGANS TENUIROSTRIS IN MEXICO

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Except for brief mention of occurrence in the states of México and Tlaxcala and the Federal District and of measurements of a small series of specimens collected a half century or more ago, no additional information has been published on *Rallus elegans tenuirostris*. This subspecies was described by Ridgway (1874) as *Rallus elegans* var. *tenuirostris* from "City of Mexico." Oberholser (1937) in his revision of the Clapper Rails (*R. longirostris*) discussed a series of rails taken by E. W. Nelson and E. A. Goldman in July, 1904, near the headwaters of the Río Lerma, referring to them as *Rallus longirostris tenuirostris*. Other, more recent major works have referred to the race of large rails inhabiting the fresh water marshes of the plateau of México, two citing *elegans* and two citing *longirostris* as the species to which this population belongs.

In conjunction with other studies in the marshes of central México, Dickerman collected fifteen specimens of this form between July, 1956, and May, 1958. These, plus two recently taken specimens from San Luis Potosí, extend greatly the known range of *tenuirostris* and add to the knowledge of its biology. All available material of *tenuirostris* was obtained on loan, as well as sufficient material of *R. longirostris*, including all specimens available from the east coast of México, to give us a better picture of the large *Rallus* complex in México. Sixteen specimens from various populations of both "species" in the United States were also at hand for comparisons.

We wish to acknowledge loan of specimens from the following institutions: Chicago Natural History Museum; Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University; Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan; University of California, Los Angeles; Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas; United States National Museum; Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University; and the Museum of Zoology, Louisiana State University. We are particularly grateful to George H. Lowery of the Louisiana State University for the loan of two specimens from San Luis Potosí and for permission to include the specimens in this report.

The known geographic range of *tenuirostris* now includes the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, México, Tlaxcala, and the Federal District. Among the 34 specimens examined there are no apparent differences which suggest geographic variability within this prescribed range. Fading, wear, "foxing," and slight individual variation account satisfactorily for all differences noted between individual birds and between differently dated collections. Localities of occurrence and specimens examined are as follows:

Jalisco: 2 mi. N.E. of Verdia (= ca. 10 km. S.S.E. of Zacualco), 3 ad. ♂♂, 1 nat. ♂.

Michoacán: Tzintzuntzan (S. shore of Lake Pátzcuaro), 1 ad. ♂; 3 mi. S.W. of Briseñas (near La Barca, E. end of Lake Chapala), 1 ad. ♀; Zacapu, 2 ad. ♂♂; 7 mi. N. of Panindicuaró (= ca. 18 km. N. of Zacapu), 1 ad. ♀; E. end of Lake Cuitzeo (= .5 mi. W. of Araró), 1 ad. ♂, 1 juv. ♂, 1 juv. ♀, 1 unsexed juv.; 1 mi. S. of Maravatío, 1 ad. ♀.

Guanajuato: Yuriria, 1 ad. ♂; 1 sight record 2 mi. E. of Salvatierra (Dickerman).

San Luis Potosí: Laguna de las Media Luna, 1 ad. ♀; Laguna de las Rusias, 1 juv. ♀.

México: Lerma, 5 ad. ♂♂, 1 juv. ♂, 1 nat. ♂, 5 ad. ♀♀, 3 juv. ♀♀; "San Mateo" (exact locality unknown), 3 ad. ♂♂, 1 ad. ♀; several heard at marshes ca. 13 mi. E. of Villa Victoria junction on Toluca-Zitácuaro highway (Dickerman).

Tlaxcala: Laguna del Rosario (Ridgway and Friedmann, 1941).

Federal District: City of México; Valley of México (part in State of México), (Ridgway and Friedmann, *op. cit.*).

Two specimens from Guanajuato in the Moore Collections at Occidental College

have been referred to the subspecies *R. e. elegans* by Friedmann, Griscom, and Moore (1950), but it is our opinion that these should be re-examined. A record of occurrence of this species at Tlacotalpam, Veracruz, has been listed by several authors, but we have not seen any specimens from that state.

King Rails were encountered at almost every extensive marsh which was visited by Dickerman on the southern part of the central plateau west of México City. In the early morning or late evening during spring and summer, one cannot fail to hear these noisy birds; and they respond to loud noises as do other rails. The edges of many of these marshes have been grazed to a considerable distance into the water; here and among the shorter rushes, water hyacinth, and open cattails these rails were sometimes seen feeding. He has seen as many as four adult rails at once in this situation. When these rails are frightened, they seek the cover of dense vegetation much of which consists of cattails growing to a height of 12 to 14 feet.

The nesting season, as indicated by the assembled specimens, begins in May and continues into July. Testis measurements on eight adult males show a maximum size of 27×10 mm. on May 15, while males collected in August show marked regression in testis size. Several from the latter month had testes as small as a November bird (9×7 mm.). Two females taken in May were not yet ready to lay while a female taken on August 31 was past breeding. Nearly fully grown young in juvenal plumage have been collected as early as July 7, while another about one week old was collected on July 22.

Four adult males weighed 271, 306, 317, and 331 grams. Three adult females weighed 220, 255, and 268 grams; a very fat female in early postjuvénal molt weighed 238 grams on November 19. The two heaviest females had "moderate fat" and "very heavy fat" and were in heavy and moderate molt on May 15 and 24. None of the males (May, August and November) had more than "little fat."

The 34 specimens which we have examined of the race *tenuirostris* are here included as a subspecies of *Rallus elegans* because of their close resemblance to *R. elegans elegans*, the only obvious differences being the paler, less boldly barred, flanks and generally paler dorsal and ventral hue of *tenuirostris*. Obviously, our specific assignment is an arbitrary decision, but inclusion of *tenuirostris* in *Rallus longirostris* obscures obvious similarities to *R. e. elegans*. The same, of course, might be said of *R. l. beldingi*, and perhaps of the other populations of large rails of northwestern México and southwestern United States. Hellmayr and Conover (1942) did place all of these in *R. elegans*. Detailed comparative studies of both "species" in the zones of range overlap, as well as of isolated populations, are essential to resolve this problem.

Rallus longirostris from Yucatán and Quintana Roo do not bear close color resemblance to *R. elegans* of the highlands of México and eastern North America. We have compared seven specimens of *R. l. pallidus* (including the type) with the unique type of *R. l. grossi* and concur on the validity of these subspecies. Three males and one female from Progreso, Yucatán, taken in May, 1938, are even paler, more silvery dorsally, than is the type of *pallidus*, and this increases the degree of difference between *pallidus* and *grossi* as described. An unsexed specimen (collected by Gaumer; in University of Kansas collections) from Cozumel (Island) and a male from Vigia Chico, Quintana Roo (March, 1949), also are closest to *pallidus* in color, although the latter specimen is very small.

Although Oberholser (1937) and Ridgway and Friedmann (*op. cit.*) have described color phases of the race *tenuirostris*, we have failed to see any evidence of color phases among the adult specimens which we have examined. Variation is most obvious between

Table 1

Measurements of Specimens of *Rallus elegans tenuirostris* and *R. longirostris pallidus*

Name	Sex	Number	Wing	Number	Culmen	Number	Tarsus
<i>tenuirostris</i>	♂ ♂	16	149-162 (154.6)	15	59-65.5 (61.8)	16	55-62 (56.2)
	♀ ♀	11	137-143 (141)	10	53.5-60 (56.7)	11	45-53 (49.8)
<i>pallidus</i>	♂ ♂	3	145-152 (148)	3	53.5-54.5 (53.8)	3	54.5-56 (55)
	♀ ♀	2	138, 141	2	51.5, 52	2	48.5, 49
Vigia Chico, Q.R.	♂		137		50		42
Cozumel	(not sexed)		152		57.8		55.5

fresh plumages and worn and faded plumages; differences in preparation of specimens have left exposed different amounts of various groups of feathers. Also, specimens collected about 50 years ago show some "foxing," especially in the light edges of the dorsal feathers. We cannot distinguish color phases either in a series of 15 *R. l. rhyzophorae* as reported by Oberholser (*op. cit.*:343).

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