

## NOTES ON VARIOUS RAILS IN MEXICO

ROBERT W. DICKERMAN

WHILE carrying out field studies on the Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*) of the Mexican Plateau from 1956 to 1958 (Dickerman, 1963), I collected other marsh birds, with special efforts spent on the elusive rails. During that period some work was done in the coastal marshes. These studies were expanded during 1961–1966 while I was living in Mexico, coordinating a research and training program in arbovirus ecology. A number of the records obtained have already been published, as cited beyond. While comparing my specimens with previously collected museum series, I encountered a few additional unrecorded or erroneously reported specimens. Specimens were collected by myself unless otherwise noted, and are deposited at the University of Minnesota and Cornell University (Ithaca).

*Rallus longirostris elegans*.—The Mexican Check-List, (Friedmann et al., 1950), listed three records of the nominate form of the “King” Rail for Mexico. Two of these were based on specimens from Guanajuato in the Moore Laboratory of Zoology, Occidental College; these prove to be referable to *R. l. tenuirostris*. The third record is based on a female (wing chord 154 mm) in the American Museum of Natural History, collected at Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, 19 January 1901; this specimen was correctly identified as *elegans*.

On 28 July 1969 I collected a male “King” Rail 2 miles west of Tecolutla, Veracruz. Although in heavy first prebasic molt with the still unmolted black rump feathers of the juvenal plumage, it has fully-grown wings (chord 161 mm) and partially enlarged testes measuring  $14 \times 6$  and  $12 \times 4$  mm. In plumage and molt it is similar to a series of young *elegans* collected at Tivoli, Texas, in August and September. In the American Museum of Natural History collection there is a male *elegans* in first prebasic molt from Brownsville, Texas collected 1 October 1912, whose outer primaries are sheathed basally. These two specimens may indicate that the *R. l. elegans* nests farther south than is currently recognized.

I believe all of the large “Ka-Ka-Ka” calling rails (the “King” Rails [*Rallus elegans*] and the “Clapper” Rails [*R. longirostris*]) of North America and their representative populations extending into the West Indies and South America should be combined into a single species, *Rallus longirostris* Boddaert. The species differences based on the morphologically distinctive and largely ecologically separated populations of the north-eastern United States break down as one examines specimens from through-

out the range of the entire complex. Interbreeding between "Clapper" and "King" Rails produces viable eggs, a mated pair has been observed with a brood, and intergrades have been identified (Meanley, 1969). Unfortunately there is no good joint common name; (it is doubtful that "Ka-Ka Rail" would be acceptable).

It is recommended that a hyphenated name King-Clapper Rail be used for the species. The current common names could be used in quotes to designate a freshwater (or richly colored) "King" Rail form or to designate a saltwater marsh (gray) "Clapper" Rail form, if these should prove useful concepts for a given study.

*Rallus longirostris tenuirostris*.—A number of specimens collected between 1961 and 1965 amplify the range of this subspecies as reviewed by Warner and Dickerman (1959). An asterisk denotes new state records; localities are quoted from specimen labels.

- \*Nayarit: 1 mile S of Compostela, 3 adult males, 1 adult female.
- Michoacan: 1 mile W Jacona, 1 adult male.
- Jalisco: 2 mile NNE Lagos de Moreno = Laguna San Juan Bautista, 1 adult male.
- Mexico: San Pedro Techuchulco (=headwaters Rio Lerma), 1 adult male, 1 adult female, 4 natal.  
Laguna Zumpango, 1 adult female, 1 immature female.
- \*Guerrero: Laguna de Tuxpan, 1 adult male.
- Tlaxcala: Laguna Rosario, 1 adult male.
- \*Puebla: Laguna San Felipe (= 10 Km NE Izucar de Matamoros), 2 adult males, 2 adult females.

*Rallus longirostris nayaritensis*.—Two subspecies of "Clapper" Rails have been described from the mainland Pacific coast of western Mexico: *R. l. rhizophorae*, which ranges from Guaymas (Kino Bay), Sonora (van Rossem, 1945) south to the northern border of Sinaloa (Ridgway and Friedmann, 1941), and *R. l. nayaritensis*, known only from an unsexed, immature bird collected at San Blas, Nayarit. The two were considered similar in the relative darkness of coloration of the upper parts, with the type of *nayaritensis* being more olivaceous, possibly due to its fresher plumage. The chief difference between the two was that the type of *nayaritensis* had the avellaneous area restricted to an ill-defined pectoral band with a pale neck, lower breast and abdomen. However it is obvious from the description that this pattern may be due to the worn condition or "make" of the type.

In the collection of the Moore Laboratory of Zoology there are two unrecorded specimens of *nayaritensis*, a female collected by Chester B.

TABLE 1

	Males		Females	
	Wing	ex. culmen	Wing	ex. culmen
<i>R. l. rhizophorae</i> (from Ridgway and Friedmann, 1941)	147-155.5 (151.8)	56-60.5 (59)	139.5-148 (142.6)	53-57.5 (55.2)
<i>R. l. nayaritensis</i>	156	60.6	141	59.3
<i>R. l. rhizophorae</i>	151-163 (n = 3)	58.4-63.1 (n = 3)	135-145	53.5-56.8

Lamb from Estero Mescales, 5 miles north of Teacapan, Sinaloa, and a male from Castillo, 11 kilometers E. of Mazatlan, Sinaloa, 13 March 1935 and 17 February 1934, respectively. The localities are about 130 and 210 kilometers northwest of San Blas. These two specimens are more olivaceous dorsally, and have richer underparts and darker flanks than the small series of *rhizophorae* at hand. Dr. Robert T. Orr kindly compared them with the type of *nayaritensis* in the collection of the California Academy of Science. He found them to be very similar to the type, with the Teacapan bird a little darker on the top of the head and slightly richer in coloration on the back (pers. comm.). Their measurements, the first available for adult *nayaritensis*, are presented in Table 1.

*Rallus longirostris rhizophorae*. Six rather worn specimens (two collected by Lamb) in the Moore Laboratory from "Isla las Tunas," Sinaloa are closest to *rhizophorae*, and extend its range about 175 km southeastwards. Measurements for five specimens are presented in Table 1. "Isla las Tunas" does not appear on the American Geographical Society 1:100,000 map. It is a small island between Isla Mero and Isla Altamura, about 44 kilometers SSW of Guanuchil, Sinaloa. Dr. L. C. Binford kindly made the critical color comparisons.

On 20 April 1962, an adult male "Clapper" Rail (along with a *R. l. tenuirostris*) was collected at Laguna San Felipe, Puebla. This is the first record of a normally coastal salt marsh subspecies from the interior of Mexico. This specimen is in color very close to *rhizophorae* from the coast of Sonora. Its measurements (exposed culmen 60.1 mm), (wing chord 155 mm) fall within those of *rhizophorae* (Table 1).

*Rallus longirostris pallidus*.—On January 1965 Allan R. Phillips, Kenneth C. Parkes, and I collected two females at Rio Lagartos, Yucatan, which apparently represent the second and third specimens from the type locality of this subspecies (Paynter, 1955). They weighed 237.3 and 301 g, with

“moderate fat” and “much fat” respectively. The latter, apparently an adult with ova up to 4 mm in diameter, had soft parts as follows: *bill*—dull orange brightest at base to horn at tip, dark horn on culmen, *legs*—dull orange, duller than bill, *iris*—medium brown.

*Rallus limicola friedmanni*.—An adult Virginia Rail collected at the water works on the south side of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, 25 January 1966, is the second record for the state, (Dickerman, 1966).

*Rallus maculatus insolitus*.—An adult male in rather worn plumage, collected 8 May 1962 at Laguna San Felipe, Puebla represents the first record for the species in the interior of Mexico (Dickerman and Warner, 1961.) It weighed 186.7 g, was in general body molt, and was rather fat. When shot, it was sitting in the sun at the edge of dense cattails.

Additional specimens from Tecolutla, Veracruz, the northernmost locality from which the species is known (Dickerman and Warner, 1961), are two adult males collected on 13 and 15 August 1969. They had little fat and weighed 207.8 and 219 g, and their gonads measured about  $9.5 \times 6$  and  $9 \times 5$ , and  $10 \times 6$  and  $6 \times 4$  mm, respectively. Both were in light general body molt. One to five Spotted Rails were seen and up to 6–7 others were heard calling on each visit to the marsh 2 miles west of Tecolutla 26 July, 13, 15, and 20 August. On 13 and 15 August I was accompanied by Fredrich Schueler. We concurred that the call note sounded like the repeated notes of the American Bittern with the increasing tempo of a Ruffed Grouse, becoming less loud towards the end of the call. The grunts or chuffings are so low in pitch that at times one has the impression he feels them prior to hearing them. The birds appeared to have calling stations—at least on those two mornings we heard two birds from virtually the same sites, and one of these was heard again on the 20th. Calling diminished rapidly after sunrise, possibly due to the advanced stage of the season and molt period, and we were unable to pin a bird down sufficiently to locate an exact calling post. All calling birds were located away from tall cattail in areas of flooded pasture or sedges, where there were occasional bushes. One specimen collected was “squeaked” back into view after running into the edge of a solid stand of cattail. For a discussion of the plumage and generic status of this species, see Dickerman and Parkes (1969).

*Porzana flaviventer woodi*.—The Yellow-breasted Rail was first reported in Mexico from Tecolutla, Veracruz by Dickerman and Warner (1961). Three individuals were seen flushed in a marsh 2 miles west of Tecolutla 13 August 1969 (one was collected), and five or six were flushed from the same marsh on 20 August 1969. An additional record from Veracruz is a male that was found as it fluttered to the ground, about 20:00,

under a street light in the rural village of Dos Amates (north of Catemaco), 2 May 1964. The specimen was prepared by A. Ramirez V. and had testes measuring about 2.5 mm.

With the assistance of Sostenes Romero R. four specimens were collected 19 April 1963, 13 and 14 March 1964, and 10 September 1965 at El Arenal on the northeast side of Laguna Tres Palos, about 19 miles east of Acapulco, Guerrero. These represent the first record for the species on the west coast of Mexico. The September bird was a male with testes measuring  $10 \times 5$  mm. Late in the evening of 22 January 1966, accompanied by Juan Nava S., I saw 4 Yellow-breasted Rails at the Laguna Lagartos, Chiapas (Mexico-Guatemala border). On the morning of 24 January we returned to the lake and Nava collected an adult male with testes measuring  $8 \times 3.5$  and two females with ovaries slightly enlarged. Two males weighed 24.1 and 26.5 g, three females 20.5, 24.0 and 25.4 g. All specimens had little to moderate fat.

*Porzana carolina*.—An early arrival date for the Sora on mainland Mexico is an immature collected at Tecolutla, Veracruz on 13 August 1969. Friedmann et al. (1950) and Paynter (1955) cite 12 August as the earliest date for the Yucatan Peninsula.

*Laterallus jamaicensis* cf. *jamaicensis*.—On 15 March 1963, I collected a female in worn plumage, and general body molt at Laguna Media Luna, 10 kilometers SW of Rio Verde, San Luis Potosi. The first Mexican specimen identified as the eastern subspecies was a male collected 2 June 1958 at Tecolutla, Veracruz, (Dickerman and Warner, 1961). Russell (1966) reported that the measurement of the width of the bill at base plus the width of bill at nostrils when divided by two and plotted against total culmen length, separated two specimens from British Honduras with short stout bills from series of *L. j. jamaicensis* and *L. j. coturniculus*. He found no color characters by which to distinguish the British Honduras birds and considered described color differences between *jamaicensis* and *coturniculus* to be only average differences at best.

I agree with Russell that color characters cannot be utilized in separating the two forms due to the paucity even of comparable old material, not to mention specimens taken in the last three decades!

Apparently due to differences in techniques, my culmen measurements were shorter than those of Russell and comparisons of that measurement could not be made with his tables. The wing measurement of the Veracruz male (68 mm) is 2 mm under the minimum for the eastern form but the wing tips are abraded. Its tarsus at 21.7 mm is near the lower limit for *jamaicensis* males. The wing and tarsal measurements of the female from San Luis Potosi, 70 and 22.4, are larger than those presented by

Russell for *coturniculus* but the wing is 0.5 mm shorter than the minimal for *jamaicensis*. On the basis of geography and these measurements I am tentatively identifying these two specimens as *jamaicensis*.

*Coturnicops noveboracensis goldmani*.—The Yellow Rail was previously known from Mexico only by the unique type of this subspecies collected by E. A. Goldman, 11 July 1904 (Friedmann et al., 1950). Late in the morning of 7 September 1961, on my way back across the wet meadow that borders the cattail marsh at San Pedro Techuchulco at the headwaters of the Rio Lerma, I decided to collect some of the abundant *Microtus* seen running from bunchgrass to bunchgrass. Firing at an animal that stopped just out of sight behind a clump of grass, I was amazed to pick up a flightless juvenile Yellow Rail. Since that time, four adults and an additional juvenile have been collected with the assistance of Juan Nava S. (See Hardy and Dickerman [1965] for photos and description of the habitat). An additional partial skeleton of an adult Yellow Rail, apparently the remains of a predator's meal, was found by Nava 22 July 1964.

These specimens have permitted a re-evaluation of the characters used in describing the subspecies. The type of *goldmani* was, although unrecognized as such, the earliest collected juvenile of the species! Nelson (1904), Ridgway and Friedmann (1941), and Deignan (1961) all cited the specimen as an "Adult? male"! Actually its remiges are all still sheathed. Comparing the four new adults with series of recently taken northern birds, *C. n. goldmani* is recognizable by its generally darker, more blackish crown and paler, less richly colored nape region with blacker, less brownish mid-feather stripes. The four adults have measurements at or near the upper limits given by Ridgway and Friedmann (1941) for 54 males and 44 females of *novaboracensis*. Three male *goldmani* measure: wing chord 90.5, 92, and 93 mm; tarsus 26.0, 26.8, and 28.0 mm as compared to northern males: wing chord 73–93 mm (86.7); tarsus 21–27.5 mm (23.7). The single female *goldmani* measures: wing chord 87 mm; tarsus 24 mm compared to northern females: wing chord 75–89 mm (84.2); tarsus 20–26 mm (22.7).

The three juveniles (including the type) fit Roberts' (1932) description of the juvenal plumage *contra* Ridgway and Friedmann (1941: 174). All are lightly spotted on the crown. They lack the white spotting on the cheeks and malar areas and upper flanks as in two short-billed specimens which are presumed immatures of the nominate form (MMNH 17616 and LSU 19180). However a male with a hard skull and fully developed bill (USNM 47812) also has white on the head. The mid-dorsal region of all three *goldmani* juveniles is streaked. The Mexican birds have white barring on either side of the streaked area. Unfortunately, a detailed study of the

plumages of the Yellow Rail must await the collection of more known juveniles and molting birds of the nominate population. Specimens illustrating the first prebasic molt have not been found in any museum series to date.

*Amaurolimnas concolor*.—Friedmann et al., (1950) listed Tutla, Oaxaca as the only Mexican locality for this species. Additional Oaxaca specimens are three adult males (AMNH) collected near Sarabia 15 July 1962 and 2 and 12 August 1964, from the collection of William Shaldach. Recently, Andrlé (1967) cited a specimen in my collection from Sontecomapan, Veracruz. Additional Veracruz specimens are from El Mirador (three adult males) and Rancho Caracol (one adult male, two adult females, and two immatures); both localities are about 30 miles WSW of Tezonapa. The El Mirador specimens were collected for me by Abraham Ramirez V. and the Caracol specimens in the R. T. Moore collection were taken in August 1948 by Chester Lamb. The latter are labelled "30 miles S. of Tezonapa." For unknown reasons Moore did not include the records of the Caracol specimens in the 1951 Mexican Check-List. A specimen in the U.S. National Museum, collected 24 April 1943 by W. A. Weber at La Venta, Tabasco, is the first record from that state. Its soft part colors (*iris*—orange vermilion; *bill*—grass-green; *ridge and top of upper mandible*—dusky; *feet*—vermilion) resemble those presented by Slud (1964) and differ from the duller colors described by Wetmore (1965). The specimen described by Wetmore was collected in February (pers. comm.) as opposed to April in the case of the Tabasco specimen; this difference may indicate a brightening of colors into the breeding season.

*Porphyryla martinica*.—On 12 August 1957, I collected an adult male Purple Gallinule with partially enlarged gonads at Laguna Zumpango, State of Mexico. A second specimen was collected at the same locality 17 June 1965, and the species was found to be relatively common on several trips to the lake in 1965 and the spring of 1966, and it possibly breeds there. Apparently this is the first report of the species in the Valley of Mexico since Salvin and Godman (1903).

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DEPARTMENT OF MICROBIOLOGY, CORNELL UNIVERSITY MEDICAL COLLEGE,  
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