

Hispaniola's first Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*)

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Photo/Annabelle Stockton Dod.

ON DECEMBER 30, 1984, F. SORIAMO an educator at the Zoological Park in Santo Domingo, brought to me a tiny live rail for identification. It had been caught by a campesino in a field under plow between Monte Plata and Bayaguana, Dominican Republic.

The bird was readily recognizable as a Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*). Although known on the other three major islands of the Greater Antilles, this rail provided the first record from Hispaniola (#1679, Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Santo Domingo). That same day, the young man who had captured the rail took me to the field. Both he and Soriamo stated that the species was numerous in the area near the Rio Yavi. Small ponds and puddles are scattered among the tall grasses (*Andropogon*) that cover tangled masses of vines. Neither of the men had ever seen or heard of a nest of this species.

Black rails of eastern North America are classified as *L. j. jamaicensis*, indistinguishable from those of the Greater Antilles (A.O.U. Check-list 1957), the latter considered indigenous and non-migratory. However, James Bond (*pers. comm.*) informs that two individuals were picked up in an exhausted condition on the beach at Matianao, in suburban Havana, Cuba, and taken to the Havana Zoological Gardens, where they thrived for many months on a diet gleaned from chunks of black swamp muck which was changed every two days.

Apparently, at least some of these rails are winter residents in the West Indies, but there is as yet no evidence that the species breeds on the islands. Lack of recent records from Jamaica and Puerto Rico is doubtless owing to mongoose predation, for this carnivore is far more numerous and widespread in Jamaica than in Cuba or Hispaniola.

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