

NEST, EGGS, AND YOUNG OF THE BLACKISH RAIL

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The Blackish Rail (*Pardirallus nigricans*) is one of the least common rails in southwestern Colombia (Hilty & Brown 1986). However, its apparent rarity may be more a consequence of its elusive behavior and the denseness of the marsh vegetation it inhabits than actual scarcity. In fact, in the northern part of the Cauca Valley the species is common, especially in small bodies of water and irrigation ditches with a dense cover of wild rice and cattails.

Because of the secretive habits of this rail, little is known of its ecology and behavior. After the first description of its nest and eggs made by Sclater & Salvin (1879) only a few brief notes on reproduction have been published for this species (e.g., Euler 1900, Ihering 1900, Ripley 1977, Ruschi 1979, Belton 1984).

On 30 May 1988, I found an unidentified nest at the base of a cattail clump in a marsh 6 km W of the town of Cartago, Depto. del Valle, Colombia (4°45'N, 75°55'W). The nest contained one single warm egg, and I could not find a bird nearby to which attribute its ownership.

Twenty-one days later, while wading through the marsh, my attention was drawn by an adult Blackish Rail running in tight circles around me and vocalizing at short intervals (ca. every 5 seconds) the *keeeeeeaa* call reported by Hilty & Brown (1986). Noting the proximity to the nest found in May because of numbered stakes of a grid set to map the marsh, I suspected that it belonged to the rail, and so I checked its contents and found three ellipsoid eggs. The nest was an elaborate, shallow cup of wild rice stems woven in concentric rings and anchored to the base of several cattail leaves. It was 230 mm wide (external diameter) and 25 mm deep. The eggs were creamy white and had sparse, irregular chestnut

spots concentrated on their larger end. Both their ground color and the brownish spotting agreed with the descriptions made by Sclater & Salvin (1879), Euler (1900), and Ruschi (1979). However, the dimensions of the only egg that I measured were larger than those reported in the literature (50 × 31.5 mm *vs.* 41 × 32 [Euler 1900], 39–41 × 30–31 [Ihering 1900], and 41 × 30 [Ruschi 1979]).

The following day (22 June 1988), I re-visited the marsh. When I reached the nest site, one adult bird threatened me with its wings partially open, a gaping bill, and loud *keeeeeeaa* sounds, before jumping on my back for a moment. The nest contained broken egg shells and a newly hatched chick. While I examined the chick, both parents kept circling me and vocalizing until I abandoned the marsh. The downy plumage of this chick was completely black and both its bill and legs were coral red. Comparing these observations to those by Belton (1984), it is apparent that the chick reported by him for this species was in fact that of *P. sanguinolentus* as he suspected. Neither the coloration of the downy coat on that chick nor that of its bill and feet matched those of the one reported on this note.

Assuming the egg found in May was laid that same day, the incubation time for this species on the Cauca Valley is at least 23 days, although Ruschi (1979) gives an incubation period of 16 days for Brazil. Pryor (1969, cited by Ripley 1977) mentioned that a captive pair of this rail incubated a set of two eggs for a total of 21 days, which is a period closer to my estimate.

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NEOTROPICAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS

The Neotropical Ornithological Congress (NOC) will take place in Quito, Ecuador, from November 3 to 9. The NOC is being hosted locally by the Corporación Ornitológica del Ecuador (CECIA) y la Pontífica Universidad Católica del Ecuador.

The meeting will include technical presentations with plenary lectures, oral and poster sessions, movies and local art shows on birds from the Neotropical region. Four special symposia have been planned on raptors, shorebirds, migratory birds, new techniques in taxonomy and museum collections in the region. In addition, a pre-congress meeting on migratory birds in the Western Hemisphere is being planned for November 2–3. Special business sessions from the Neotropical Ornithological Society and the International Council for Bird Preservation will take place.

Hotel accommodation in Quito ranges from five star hotels (\$140 US dollars) to cheaper accommodation down to \$30 US dollars. The local Committee is looking into the possibility of housing Latinamerican students attending the Congress with Ecuadorians living in Quito.

A number of field pre- and post-congress trips have been planned by the Local Committee including: the Galapagos Islands, the Ecuadorian Amazon (Cuyabeno, Yuturi, Lower Aguarico River Region), Mono (Mindo Road) and Same (Rio Palenque, Same, Esmeraldas). One day tours include Papallacta-Baeza, Quito-Pasochoa, Quito-Pichincha and Cotopaxi National Park.

Registration and submission of abstracts should be sent to Ms. Nancy Hilgert de Benavides, Chair, Local Committee, CECIA, Casilla 9068 S-7, Quito, Ecuador. Telephone: 59-32-542-058. Fax: 9-32-560-506. Registration forms can be requested via Nancy Hilgert in Quito or via Mario Ramos (WWF, 1250 24th St. NW. Washington, D.C. 20037. Phone (202) 778-9501 and Fax (202) 293-9211.

Hotel accommodations and pre- and post-congress tours can be booked via Viajes Orion, S. A., Post Office Box 17-03-169, Quito, Ecuador, Phones: (593) 2-560505/2-553210/2-545998. Fax: (593) 2-560506.

Important dates to remember:

Submission of abstracts for consideration of the Scientific Committee: July 31, 1991

Registration: August 31, 1991

Hotel and tour reservations: July 30, 1991, except for the Galapagos trip when due date is June 30, 1991.