

DISTRIBUTION RECORDS FROM TECOLUTLA, VERACRUZ,  
WITH THE FIRST RECORD OF *PORZANA*  
*FLAVIVENTER* FOR MEXICO

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THE coastal plain of the state of Veracruz, Mexico has probably been traversed by more ornithologists than any other portion of the country. The recent Distributional Checklist of the Birds of Mexico (Friedmann et al., 1950, and Miller et al., 1957) included all records from the region, and Loetscher (1955) summarized the records of North American migrants from Veracruz. On 26 and 27 April and 1 and 2 June 1958, while accompanied by Bruce J. Hayward, Dickerman visited a small fresh-water marsh located about 4.5 miles northwest of Tecolutla. He revisited the marsh briefly on 6 November 1958 with Warner and John R. Tester. During these short visits, 25 specimens of 10 species were prepared. The collection includes two forms new to Mexico, and extends the ranges of three other species formerly known in Mexico only from the states of Chiapas and Quintana Roo. Four species not recorded before in Veracruz were collected or observed.

The marsh is located three to four miles behind the beach dunes along the coast. It is one mile north of the Tecolutla-Poza Rica highway from which it is not visible. The part of the marsh visited was 40 to 60 acres in extent, but the marsh must vary greatly in size with variations in water level. On the inland side of the marsh are low rolling hills partly heavily vegetated with tropical lowland forest and partly cleared for farming. Springs from the base of the hills feed the marsh. Immediately against the base of the hills is a stand of several acres of cattails and bulrushes. Spreading outward from this are extensive marsh meadows of shorter grasses, *Equisetum*, *Pontederia*, and other emergent aquatics, with several ponds scattered about close to the cattails or in depressions elsewhere.

A large shallow pond which was present on the south side of the dense cattails on the April visit provided a resting area for numbers of Black-bellied Tree Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, and a few other ducks. Its muddy edges were used as feeding areas for shore birds and American Coots. Several deeper smaller ponds were found farther out in the marsh. These varied in depth from one to four feet. They contained white water lilies and water hyacinth and were bordered by taller stands of *Pontederia*, bulrushes, and other emergent aquatics. The open marshy meadow was dissected by ditches and deep wagon ruts which were often obscured by dense plant growth, causing frequent soakings of the investigators. A few shrubby trees, mostly *Acacia*, grew on the higher areas of the marsh.



The growth of vegetation and fluctuations of water level made work in the marsh increasingly difficult as the season progressed. On the first visit the grasses were about eight to twelve inches tall; on 1 June all of the vegetation had increased greatly in density and there were no open areas of water. The marsh was barely penetrated on the November visit due to the great difficulty in wading through knee-deep water with dense tangles of tough trailing stolons from the grasses.

The following annotated list includes only species whose status was found to differ from that in the references cited above, or where previous records are scarce. All specimens were collected by Dickerman unless otherwise noted. Taxonomic comments on *Pardirallus* and *Laterallus* are based on his examination of specimens in certain collections mentioned in the acknowledgments. The Pinnated Bittern (*Botaurus pinnatus*) from this collection is discussed by Dickerman elsewhere in this issue (pp. 333-335).

White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchus*).—Seventy-five seen over the marsh on 26 April and a flock of about 200 flew over the town of Tecolutla on the coast on 2 June. The latest previous date for the species in Veracruz is 16 April.

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*).—Three were seen on 27 April, two on 2 June, and one on 6 November. One seen on 27 April and one on 2 June were crippled; the former was collected. On 6 November, Warner shot an odd appearing bird flying over a nearby field that proved to be an oil-stained bittern of this species. The region is one of extensive oil fields.

Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*).—Two were flushed from the deep grass on 26 and 27 April.

Spotted Rail (*Pardirallus maculatus*).—Bruce Hayward and Dickerman first entered the edge of the marsh about 8:30 AM on 26 April. They were almost immediately attracted by a sound not at all unlike very muffled "pumpings" of the American Bittern. The calls came from a stand of a large *Carex* that was taller than the surrounding flooded grassy meadow. Approaching closer and closer, and even standing at the edge of this small clump, nothing could be seen but the sounds continued. Finally rushing into the taller plants, Dickerman flushed a large rail at his feet, and shot it before it had flown far. It was a Spotted Rail. He heard one or two others calling, and, within an hour's tramping had flushed two others, one of which he was able to collect. On 1 June Dickerman flushed one pair and one or two single birds, and on 2 June another pair and one or two more single birds were flushed. A third specimen was collected on 1 June. On 6 November, two or three birds were flushed, but could not be collected.

The soft parts of the first bird (unsexed) taken 26 April were recorded in the field. The "feet were pale orange-red, near 'old rose.' The bill was pale yellowish-green, with a Chinese red spot near the base of the lower mandible. Iris red." The bill of the female taken the same day was noted to be similar in color but slightly darker. All three birds had moderate to heavy fat; the first, shot at close range, was not sexed or weighed. The female weighed 161 grams; a male taken on 1 June weighed 211 grams. These two birds in the flesh measured: length 298 and 322, and extent 410 and 430 mm., respectively.

The Spotted Rail was previously known in Mexico only from the region of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, and Ocozocoautla Chiapas (del Toro, 1958). The race *insolitus* is known only from the type specimen from Yacacos Lagoon, British Honduras and from Chiapas. The Tecolutla birds were compared with the type of *insolitus* at the Museum of Comparative



Zoology and were found not to differ from it in any significant way. The type is a worn bird taken in June 1907, and may show some foxing. The deep chocolate brown edgings of *insolitus* are even more pronounced in the less worn Tecolutla specimens. *Insolitus* shares with *inoptatus* the character of having white spots instead of long streaks on the inner remiges, upper wing coverts, and tertials as in *maculatus*. Within each of the races there is great variability in the width of the ventral white barring and size of the white spots on the dorsal parts. Some individuals have the black bars of the ventral surface so reduced as to give the appearance of having nearly white throats and bellies. The relation of this variation to age and sex, if any, is unknown.

Sora (*Porzana carolina*).—Except for the following species, Soras were the commonest rail in the marsh. On the first visit, 26 and 27 April, about ten were seen. Two were seen and one was heard calling on 2 June, a late date for spring migrants. One or two were seen during the few minutes spent in the marsh on 6 November.

Yellow-breasted Rail (*Porzana flaviventer woodi*).—This diminutive species was the commonest rail in the marsh. It was encountered on every visit to the marsh except the last one on 6 November. During morning and evening collecting periods on 26 April, and in the morning of the following day, at least nine of these little rails were seen and three were collected. During the visits in late afternoon on 1 June and early morning on 2 June, 30 were estimated to have been seen, six of which were collected. The birds were seen only as they flushed and fluttered weakly over the grass before dropping back into the dense vegetation. From the manner in which the birds flushed, Dickerman gained the impression that they were high up in the somewhat matted grasses a foot or more above the water. As many as three were seen flying at the same time.

The race *woodi* was described by van Rossem (1934) from two specimens taken at Lake Olomoga, El Salvador. He separated *woodi* from the Antillean races *hendersoni* and *gossii* on the following basis: crown (of males) paler, pectoral region whiter, median upper parts browner, less blackish, dorsal white markings narrower and less extensive, black loreal streak narrower (1 mm. wide). In comparing the nine Tecolutla birds, the topotype of *woodi*, and a specimen from 7 miles W. of San Carlos, San Juan River, Nicaragua taken 2 (?) May 1917, with eleven *gossii* and five *hendersoni*, we find that none of the above characters as described is of value in separating *woodi* from the Antillean races. We are unable to find characters to separate the Mexican birds from the topotype or the Nicaragua specimen. Hence, the mainland population as a whole and *hendersoni* are separated from *gossii* only by size (Table 1). Three specimens of *hendersoni* at hand, all in relatively little worn plumage (13 February, 11 March, and no date), are easily separable from all specimens of *woodi* and *gossii* by being lighter, more sandy buff, and less ocheraceous on all light edges of wing feathers. One *woodi*, a worn and faded specimen in heavy molt, is paler, but remains less sandy than the three *hendersoni*. Two worn *hendersoni* (13 June and 15 July) are lighter in color when compared feather area by feather area to worn *woodi* and *gossii*. We can find no color difference of value in separating *gossii* and *woodi*.

The northern races are separated from the South American forms as described by previous authors, and by size (Table 1). No significant geographic variation was found among the 29 specimens of the race *flaviventer* at hand.

Four males of *woodi* weighed 25.0 to 28.8 (average 26.5) grams. Five females of *woodi* weighed 24.0 to 28.3 (average 25.3) grams.

The immature plumages of *Porzana flaviventer* have not been described. One bird in post-juvinal molt, a female No. 13278 in the H. B. Conover Collection (Chicago Natural History Museum) from 170 Km. W. Puerto Casado, Paraguay, has the barring on the flanks continuing to the tips of the ocheraceous-buff feathers of the sides of the breast.



TABLE 1  
MEASUREMENTS OF *Porzana flaviventer* IN MILLIMETERS

	No.	Wing Cord		Tarsus		Culmen	
		Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean
<i>gossii</i> <sup>1</sup>	16	63.5-71	67.6	20-24	22.7	16-18	17.2
	11	65-74	68.5	20-24.5	22.5	15.5-17.5	16.3
<i>hendersoni</i>	2	62, 63		20.8, 22.4		15.7, 16.6	
	3	61-64	62.7	22.0-22.6	22.36	15.2-16.0	15.56
<i>woodi</i>	5	61-63	62.0	21.0-22.7	21.82	15.0-17.0	16.27
	6	63-66	63.9	21.6-22.6	22.13	14.5-15.9	15.23
<i>flaviventer</i>	14	64-73	69.0	22.0-25.6	23.68	15.1-17.0	16.33
	13	66-79	70.7	20.6-24.8	22.80	14.4-15.6	14.92

<sup>1</sup> Measurements for *gossii* taken from Ridgway and Friedmann (1941: 146).

A second specimen from the same locality taken on 2 March (Conover Coll. 96143), still retains minute bars of black on some of the breast feathers. Several of the Tecolutla birds taken on both visits were in heavy body molt.

Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis jamaicensis*).—A male in rather worn plumage was collected on 2 June. Its testes were slightly enlarged, measuring 6 × 4 mm. right, and 5 × 4 mm. left. Its measurements are: wing 68 mm., tarsus 2.15 mm., culmen 14.4 mm., middle toe without claw 22.1 mm. In the flesh its length measured 162 mm., its extent 240 mm., and it weighed 32.8 grams. It was moderately fat and was in general molt. Moreno (1953) assembled the sparse material available from the West Indies and failed to find valid characters to separate the named eastern races.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*).—A female was taken from a flock of mixed shore birds on the shallow open pond on 27 April. It presumably belongs to the eastern race, although its measurements made before skeletonizing are not determinate, being: wing 174 mm., tail 67 mm. The flock of shore birds included Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral and Least Sandpipers, one Common Snipe, two Upland Plovers, and at least two Long-billed Dowitchers.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Micropalama himantopus*).—Four or five were present in the above group of mixed shore birds. Two were collected, and are apparently the first specimens of the species taken in Veracruz.

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*).—On 26 April, Bruce Hayward and Dickerman saw about 15 sitting on a sandy spit at the mouth of the Río Tecolutla in company with about 25 Laughing Gulls and 30 Sandwich Terns.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*).—During 26 and 27 April several hundred Mourning Doves were seen lining power lines and fences and feeding in flocks in pastures.

Swallows (Hirundinidae).—The evening of 25 April when Hayward and Dickerman arrived in the Tecolutla area they saw many hundreds of migrating swallows. The following two days they were also present in these large numbers. Bank and Barn Swallows each formed about half of the assemblage, with but a very occasional Tree, Rough-winged, and Cliff Swallow seen. One Barn Swallow was seen on 2 June.

Long-billed Marsh Wren (*Telmatodytes palustris*).—Three specimens were collected and eight or more Long-billed Marsh Wrens were seen 26 and 27 April. They tended



to be secretive, and some appeared to be in heavy molt. The three specimens, all females, had moderate fat to excessive fat, and weighed 10.9, 11.3, and 11.8 grams. The oviduct on the heaviest was very slightly enlarged. None was seen on 2 June.

Altamira Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis flavovelata*) (see frontispiece).—An adult male was taken 27 April, and a pair of very worn birds was preserved in formalin on 2 June. During the earlier visit this species was greatly outnumbered by migrants of the "Common" Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*). On 2 June little attention was accorded this group and Dickerman did not notice if the "*trichas*" type was present in the marsh. This extends the range of *G. flavovelata* 130 miles southeastward from its known range in the vicinity of Tampico, Tamaulipas.

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*).—One was seen 27 April by Dickerman. This apparently adds a new species to the state's list.

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