

First documentation of Mangrove Rail *Rallus longirostris* breeding in Costa Rica

Since the first report for Costa Rica in mangroves at the Gulf of Nicoya, on the Pacific coast, in early 2000¹, Mangrove Rail *Rallus longirostris* apparently went undetected until mid 2011, since when it has been found in at least five sites around the Gulf (pers. obs.; eBird). All sites are stunted mangroves—a microhabitat of limited extent. Perhaps it is the uninteresting appearance of these patches to birdwatchers, together with the typically secretive behaviour of the genus, which has contributed to the lack of records.

Known populations of Mangrove and Clapper Rails *R. crepitans* in the tropics are sedentary^{2,3}, and likewise the Costa Rican population is expected to be resident. Nevertheless, until now, there was no confirmation of breeding in the country.

On 26 June 2015, we visited Chomes, a coastal site well known for its concentrations of shorebirds and, in addition, the most accessible site for Mangrove Rail. We played a recording of the vocalisation (made by A. Spencer at the same site: XC168570)

and almost immediately heard a response. From the dirt track, RG observed an individual running away across open terrain before disappearing into a dense stand of stunted mangroves 30 m distant. LG walked about halfway towards the bird and played the recording again. A bird responded from within an isolated mangrove clump between us. LG slowly moved closer and found a bird within the

vegetation. Further observation revealed that it was on what appeared to be a nest, whereupon we withdrew (Fig. 1).

LG returned on 30 June and found the nest unattended but with five eggs. The eggs were dull white with small grey and purplish spots, more heavily marked at the larger end (Fig. 2). RG subsequently returned on 5 and 17 July. On the first date,



Figure 1. Mangrove Rail *Rallus longirostris* habitat and nest site (in centre of foreground mangrove), Chomes, Gulf of Nicoya, Costa Rica, July 2015 (Richard Garrigues)



Figure 2 (left). Eggs of Mangrove Rail *Rallus longirostris*, Chomes, Gulf of Nicoya, Costa Rica, June 2015 (Leonardo Garrigues)
Figure 3 (right). Empty nest of Mangrove Rail *Rallus longirostris*, Chomes, Gulf of Nicoya, Costa Rica, July 2015 (Richard Garrigues)

the nest could not be reached due to a high tide, although two adults separately entered the shrub containing the nest. On 17 July, the nest was empty, with no evidence of eggshell fragments or signs of predation. Although two birds were heard in the vicinity, none was seen. It was during this visit that the nest was examined more closely.

The nest was in a stunted black mangrove *Avicennia germinans* and was constructed of small twigs, presumably of the same bush in which it was built. The platform measured c. 30 cm across and 5 cm thick, with a shallow depression in the centre that held the eggs (Fig. 3). The construction was c.40 cm above ground in a bush no more than 70 cm tall. Apparently the nest was just above the high-water level, as a photograph taken on 5 July

shows the high tide, during one of the highest tides of the month, reaching just below it.

Although we are unaware if the nesting attempt was successful, this does constitute the first documented nest of Mangrove Rail in Costa Rica.

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