

Article

What is *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819? The true identity of Azara's (1805) No. 372 Ypacahá del Pardo

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Received 03 January 2022

Accepted 18 October 2023

Published 10 November 2023

DOI 10.1590/1678-4766e2023016

ABSTRACT. The identity of the bird described from Paraguay by Félix de Azara as No. 372 Ypacahá del Pardo is confirmed as the immature plumage of the Spotted Rail *Pardirallus maculatus maculatus* (Boddaert, 1783). This description is the basis for the name *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819 which is thus a junior subjective synonym and an available name. *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819 is the type species of the genus *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890. *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890 is a junior subjective synonym of *Pardirallus* Bonaparte, 1856 and is also available for application.

KEYWORDS. *Ortygonax*, *Pardirallus maculatus*, *Pardirallus nigricans*, *Pardirallus sanguinolentus*, Rallidae.

RESUMO. O que é *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819? A verdadeira identidade de Azara (1805) No. 372 Ypacahá del Pardo. A identidade da ave do Paraguai descrita por Félix de Azara como No. 372 Ypacahá del Pardo é confirmada como a plumagem imatura da saracura-carijó *Pardirallus maculatus maculatus* (Boddaert, 1783). Esta descrição e a base para o nome *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819 que é, portanto, um sinônimo júnior, e disponível para sua aplicação. *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819 é a espécie-tipo do gênero *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890. *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890 é um sinônimo júnior de *Pardirallus* Bonaparte, 1856 e também está disponível para aplicação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE. *Ortygonax*, *Pardirallus maculatus*, *Pardirallus nigricans*, *Pardirallus sanguinolentus*, Rallidae.

The name *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819, based on Azara's (1805) bird No. 372, Ypacahá del Pardo, has long been associated with the Plumbeous Rail (SHARPE, 1894; PETERS, 1934), currently named *Pardirallus sanguinolentus*. It is also the type species of the genus *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890. However, doubts over the identity of Azara's text (ZIMMER, 1930; HELLMAYR, 1932), which clearly refers to juvenile birds, led to the widespread abandonment of Vieillot's name in favour of the current name *Pardirallus sanguinolentus* (Swainson, 1838). Since then, there has been no real attempt to review the identification of the description in the light of modern knowledge, despite the issue remaining unresolved, and all the major reviewers of Azara's work have identified the description as *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819 (HARTLAUB, 1847; BERLEPSCH, 1887; BERTONI, 1901; LAUBMANN, 1939; PEREYRA, 1945).

It is important to note here that the French edition of Azara's (1805) original Spanish language work was translated by Sonnini (AZARA, 1809) and this was, until

recently, the most widely circulated version of Azara's work. However, it contained serious errors, mistranslations and omissions that greatly impoverished it in comparison to the original. The scientific descriptions of Azara's species by Vieillot were abbreviated yet further, including only a brief diagnosis, omitting much of the diagnostic morphometric data and eliminating entirely Azara's contextual discussions. AZARA (1805), at the author's request, was intended to be considered the definitive work. Limited access to it by historical researchers has contributed to the confusion as to the identity of several descriptions that are only now being elucidated (SMITH, 2017, 2018a-d, 2020a-f, 2021; SMITH & CLAY, 2021; SMITH *et al.*, 2018). Here I propose a new interpretation for the identity of AZARA (1805) No. 372 Ypacahá del Pardo and clarify the nomenclatural implications.

A translation of the description of AZARA (1805) No. 372 Ypacahá del Pardo is reproduced below (original Spanish text in Appendix I) (1 line = 2.256 mm; 1 inch = 27.07 mm, these being the French measurements used by Azara):

NUM. CCCLXXII
DEL PARDO

I have had three identical. Length 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches: tail 2 $\frac{5}{12}$: wingspan 16 $\frac{1}{2}$; and to the base of the neck 6. The sides of the head and crown are brownish-grey: the nape to the back are light brown; and from there to the tail and the coverts pure brown; but the median part of the feathers is somewhat darker, and the flight feathers and tail; dark. Below the head brownish-white, and the throat to the legs and sides bluish-grey: but from the clavicle to the cloaca there is a notable white stripe, because the tips of the feathers are white. The under-tail coverts are dark grey with the tips and edges cinnamon-brown: the same is true on the legs, underside and sides of the rump. The flight feathers and coverts are lustrous grey, with barely visible thin white edging on the lesser coverts.

Flight feathers 22, the third and fourth longest: tail 12 feathers, the outermost 8 lines shorter: leg 35, the 6 naked: tarsus 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ coral red, except for behind where it is darker: mid-toe 21: bill 25 $\frac{1}{2}$, very large in comparison to the others, somewhat wrinkled at the base just like the others, dark green, and the iris red.

Later I captured two at 32 degrees of latitude, that did not differ other than in having the tarsus dull reddish and the entire bill very dark green.

Buffon¹ describes *le Rale à longbec de Cayenne*, saying: that it is larger than the European species, that it has a longer bill in proportion to the others: that the plumage is grey with little cinnamon on the front of the body, and mixed with dark grey on the back and wings: and that the venter is striped with black-and-white bands. To my mind these indications are applicable to mine, and differ only in the manner that they are explained. The plate 849 shows the 12 inches of mine: it lightens the brown on the sides and top of the head: it washes the brown of the throat to the stomach with cinnamon, omits the white line from the base of the neck to the cloaca: it marks the stripes on the sides too much: and it colours the tarsus yellow and the bill orange-brown.

The author adds that: in Guyana there is also another species or variety of the same, that also has a long bill; but it is much larger, having the stature of the *Barge*. And as this has 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, it is clear that it cannot be the species depicted on plate 849, nor even a variety of it; but as the colours are not described, it is impossible to guess what this second *Rale ó Ypacahá* might be.

¹ Tome 15 page 251.

The bird described by SHARPE (1894) under the name *Limnopardalus rytirhynchus* (based apparently on information from W. H. Hudson, in the same sense as the name is used in SCLATER & HUDSON, 1889) is clearly the Plumbeous Rail, but this description bears no resemblance to the description of AZARA (1805) or VIEILLOT (1819).

Though it is unclear on what basis, PETERS (1934) also considered *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot to be “identifiable” as a Plumbeous Rail *Pardirallus sanguinolentus* (Swainson, 1838), but ZIMMER (1930) and HELLMAYR (1932) disagreed and provided convincing arguments to support their case. ZIMMER (1930) stated that:

“Vieillot based his name on Azara’s description of three apparently young birds from Paraguay which, among other characters, had a white stripe from throat to crissum and had bills measuring 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ lignes = 80 mm. Neither character seems to apply to the species long identified with the description and even if the three birds (which Azara says were all alike) were abnormal specimens of some rail of the present genus, there is no evidence that they were not of the species named *nigricans* by Vieillot, based on adults also described by Azara from Paraguay.”

That ZIMMER (1930) did not have access to AZARA (1805) is indicated by his repetition of the transcription error in the French translation of Azara’s work by Sonnini (AZARA, 1809), in which the bill measurement is given as 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ lines instead of 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ lines (as per the Spanish original). This error was also repeated by VIEILLOT (1819:549). Furthermore, he talks of a “white stripe from the throat to the crissum” which misrepresents the Spanish text that talks of a white stripe from the clavicle (or lower neck) to the crissum formed by white feather tips (i.e. not necessarily a distinct and solid line), again this resulting from a mistranslation by Sonnini. ZIMMER’S (1930) hypothetical suggestion that the birds could also potentially be abnormal Blackish Rails *Pardirallus nigricans* (VIEILLOT, 1819) presumably falls foul of the same factors that were used to disqualify Plumbeous Rail from consideration. However, it ignores the fact that AZARA (1805) also mentioned taking two identical birds at 32°S (in Argentina), well to the south of the known range of Blackish Rail, but within the current known range of two other species of *Pardirallus*, the aforementioned Plumbeous Rail and Spotted Rail *P. maculatus* (BODDAERT, 1783). Once again this distributional information, was omitted by Sonnini (in AZARA, 1809) and VIEILLOT (1819).

Further omissions from the French text also directly affect the understanding of it. Sonnini made only passing reference to the crucial comparison to the *Rale à longbec de Cayenne*, dismissing Azara’s comparison of the two birds by blithely stating that their respective plumages “do not resemble each other” (despite the fact that Azara, the only author to have actually seen the specimens, clearly thought they did!). VIEILLOT (1819) omitted mention of the comparison entirely, his text containing only the roughly-translated version of the first paragraph of Azara’s description lifted from Sonnini, along with a description of the colours of the soft parts adapted from the 2nd paragraph of the Spanish original (but omitting the measurements).

HELLMAYR (1932) also apparently did not have access to the Spanish original text, stating that “no definite locality

is mentioned” by Azara, noting some plumage characteristics clearly taken from the French translations, and repeating the erroneous bill measurements that appeared in them. Indeed, working solely from VIELLOT (1819) and Sonnini (in AZARA, 1809) I have sympathy with the conclusions of ZIMMER (1930) and HELLMAYR (1932) that the descriptions are unidentifiable. However, I reject the conclusion of PETERS (1934) that either of these French-language descriptions is categorically identifiable as the Plumbeous Rail *Pardirallus sanguinolentus*. In fact, reference to AZARA (1805) confirms that the Ypacahá del pardo is conclusively identifiable as a juvenile of the Spotted Rail *Pardirallus maculatus* (plumages that were poorly-known at the time these authors were working). I explain my case below.

1. Morphometrics (Tab. I): the measurements of the three *Pardirallus* species that occur in Paraguay are largely undiagnostic, and allowing for individual variation they have similar proportions and sizes to each other. However, given that the bill measurement given in the French language works is erroneous as previously established, it is important to confirm that Ypacahá del Pardo is indeed a member of this genus. Even though the measurements for Azara No. 370-372 are slightly larger than those provided by TAYLOR & VAN PERLO (1998) for the two species represented, the table below demonstrates that according to the measuring techniques used by the author, Ypacahá del Pardo is a bird of very similar proportions to both 370 Ypacahá jaspeado todo (Spotted Rail) and 371 Ypacahá obscuro (Blackish Rail) and thus clearly a *Pardirallus*. It would seem pertinent to add here that while AZARA’S (1805) written description of 371 Ypacahá obscuro is certainly a Blackish Rail, the individual he claims to have seen close to the northern coast of the River Plate (“cerca de la costa norte del Rio de La Plata”) in Uruguay is without doubt a Plumbeous Rail, as Blackish Rail does not occur in that country or at that latitude (ASPIROZ, 1997).

2. White spotting and/or edging: juvenile plumages of the Spotted Rail are poorly known and apparently rather variable, especially in the amount of white flecking on the body (DICKERMAN & PARKES, 1969; DICKERMAN & HAVERSCHMIDT, 1971). TAYLOR & VAN PERLO (1998) followed DICKERMAN & HAVERSCHMIDT (1971) in calling these variations “dark, pale and barred morphs” but the variation seems likely to be along a spectrum, with some individuals heavily spotted or barred, and others only sparsely so. AZARA (1805) mentions white tips to feathers on two occasions, once along the infamous medial “stripe” from the “clavicle to the crissum” (NOT the throat to the crissum) and again on the edges of the lesser coverts (*ribetito blanco poco sensible en las tapadas menores*). Indeed, there may even be additional white on the plumage that Azara was less clear about (see point 3), but regardless neither the Plumbeous Rail nor the Blackish Rail habitually show white markings in these areas (TAYLOR & VAN PERLO, 1998), whilst the Spotted Rail typically does in most plumages.

The variability of spotting on the upperparts of juvenile Spotted Rails is indicated adequately in Fig. 1 of DICKERMAN & PARKES (1969), whilst in Fig. 2 the right hand specimen [from Trinidad but stated by DICKERMAN & HAVERSCHMIDT (1971) to be similar to FMNH 11,009 from Paraguay] shows considerable white along the medial line of the underparts from the lower neck to the crissum, as described by Azara. The authors also note that the “undertail coverts of the juvenile specimens of *P. maculatus* from Argentina and Paraguay are dusky gray or white, broadly tipped with buff” again consistent with Azara’s description.

3. Comparison with the plate of *le Rale á longbec de Cayenne*: two statements by Azara are relevant here. First he states “To my mind these indications are applicable to mine, and differ only in the manner that they are explained” indicating that he does see similarities between Ypacahá del Pardo and *Rale á longbec de Cayenne* despite Sonnini’s hubris. And secondly his note that the plate “marks the stripes on the sides **too much** (emphasis mine)” (“*le marca demasiado los listones en los costados*”) indicates that in fact stripes were present on the sides of the Ypacahá del Pardo, albeit more faintly than those of the plate *Rale á longbec de Cayenne*. This is no small point, as the only species of

Tab. I. Comparative morphometrics for the putative members of *Pardirallus* described in AZARA (1805):370-372.

	(1 line = 2.256 mm; 1 inch = 27.07 mm)	370 Ypacahá jaspeado todo	371 Ypacahá obscuro	372 Ypacahá pardo
		<i>Pardirallus maculatus</i>	<i>Pardirallus nigricans</i>	<i>Pardirallus sp.</i>
Total length		11 ¼ inches (304.54 mm)	11 inches (297.77 mm)	11 ¾ inches (318.07 mm)
Tail		2 inches (54.14 mm)	2 inches (54.14 mm)	2 5/12 inches (65.51 mm)
Wingspan		17 ¼ inches (466.96 mm)	15 inches (406.05 mm)	16 ½ inches (446.66 mm)
Length to base of neck		5 2/3 inches (153.22 mm)	5 ¼ inches (142.12 mm)	6 inches (162.42 mm)
Flight feathers		21 (2 nd and 3 rd equal)	22 (4 th and 5 th longest)	22 (3 rd and 4 th longest)
Tail feathers		12	12	12
Leg		33 lines (74.45 mm)	35 lines (78.96 mm)	35 lines (78.96 mm)
Tarsus		22 lines (49.63 mm)	24 lines (54.14 mm)	22 ½ lines (50.76 mm)
Mid-toe		19 lines (42.86 mm)	21 lines (47.38 mm)	21 lines (47.38 mm)
Bill		21 ½ lines (50.76 mm)	22 lines (49.63 mm)	25 ½ lines (57.53 mm)

Pardirallus that shows any sign of banding on the flanks in any plumage is the Spotted Rail.

4. The “*rytirhynchos*”: the direct translation of Vieillot’s scientific name means “wrinkled bill” and this is based on the reference by Azara to the “somewhat wrinkled base of the bill” in Ypacahá del Pardo. An “irregularly corrugated” bill base was cited as one of the diagnostic characteristics of *Pardirallus* by FRIEDMANN (1941) (at that time considered a monotypic genus with Spotted Rail as the sole member) and this was used to distinguish *Pardirallus* from *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890 which was said to lack it (and to which both Plumbeous and Blackish Rail were assigned by that author). AZARA (1805) also infers the presence of this character in his No. 370 Ypacahá del Jaspeado Todo (adult Spotted Rail) with the phrase “*su calva no se interna*” (the bare area is not inserted), but crucially omits mention of it for No. 371 Ypacahá del Oscuro, the Blackish Rail.

CONCLUSION

Only one member of *Pardirallus* shows the combination of characteristics described by AZARA (1805), including, but not limited to, the wrinkled bill base, barred flanks, white flecking on the plumage, buff tips to dark grey under-tail coverts and a distribution that extends to 32°S in Argentina, and that is the Spotted Rail.

NOMENCLATURAL IMPLICATIONS

As *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819 is based entirely on AZARA’s (1805) No. 372 Ypacahá del Pardo, it (along with all of its subsequent misspellings) is a junior subjective synonym of *Rallus maculatus* Boddaert, 1783. Repeated usage of this name after 1901 by multiple authors means that it is an available name, but is not the valid name of the species under the Principle of Priority (ICZN, 1999; Article 23).

The type species of *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890 is *Rallus rytirhynchos* Vieillot, 1819 [= *Pardirallus maculatus maculatus* (Boddaert, 1783)], so *Ortygonax* Heine, 1890 is a junior subjective synonym of *Pardirallus* Bonaparte, 1856.

Acknowledgements. Thanks to the PRONII program of CONACyT Paraguay for its support. Special thanks to Félix de Azara for his work, which is still relevant over 200 years since its publication and to the anonymous library workers behind the Biodiversity Heritage Library who make many hard to find references available for all to consult from the comfort of their own home. Steven Gregory and Edward Dickinson provided assistance with nomenclatural issues.

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Appendix I. Original Spanish text of AZARA (1805).

NUM. CCCLXXII DEL PARDO

He tenido tres idénticos. Longitud $11 \frac{3}{4}$ pulgadas: cola $2 \frac{1}{2}$: braza $16 \frac{1}{2}$; y hasta la raíz del cuello 6. El costado de la cabeza y sobre ella pardos oscuros; el cogote hasta la espalda pardos claros: y de allí a la cola y cobijas pardas puras; pero el centro de las plumas es algo más oscuro, y los, remos y cola; oscuros. Bajo de la cabeza parda blanquizca, y la garganta hasta las piernas y costados pardos azulados; pero desde la clavícula al orificio hay una notable tira blanquizca, porque lo son las puntas de las plumas. Los timoneles inferiores oscuros con las puntas y bordas pardas acaneladas; sucediendo lo mismo a las piernas y a lo inferior y costados de la rabadilla. Los remos y tapadas oscuras lustrosas, con ribetito blanco poco sensible en las tapadas menores.

Remos 22, el tercero y cuarto mayores: cola 12 plumas, la de afuera 8 líneas más corta: pierna 35, las 6 desnudas: tarso $22 \frac{1}{2}$ de coral roxo, menos por detras que es oscuro: dedo medio 21: pico $25 \frac{1}{2}$, muy largo respecto a los demás, algo arrugado en la raíz como en todos, verde oscuro, y el iris roxo.

Después cogí dos en los 32 grados de latitud, que no diferían sino en tener el tarso oscuro roxizo, y todo el pico muy oscuro verdoso.

Describe Buffon¹ *le Rale á longbec de Cayenne*, diciendo: que es mayor que los europeos, y que tiene el pico más largo á proporción que los demás: que su plumage es gris con poco acanelado en lo anterior del cuerpo, y mezclado de oscuro en la espalda y alas: y que el vientre está rayado al través de tiras blancas y negras. A mí me parece que esta indicación conviene con la mía, y que no difieren sino en el modo de explicarse. La estampa 849 le marca las 12 pulgadas del mió: le aclara el pardo de los costados y sobre la cabeza: le baña de canela el pardo de la garganta hasta el estómago, negándole la tira blanquizca desde la raíz del cuello al orificio: le marca demasiado los listones en los costados: y le tiñe el tarso amarillazo, y el pico naranjado pardo.

Añade el autor: que en Guyana hay además otra especie ó acaso variedad de la misma, que también tiene el pico largo; pero que es mucho mayor, siendo su estatura la del *Barge*. Y como éste tenga $16 \frac{1}{2}$ pulgadas, es evidente que no puede ser de la especie que la estampa 849, ni aun variedad de la misma; pero como no explica sus colores, es imposible adivinar qual pueda ser este segundo *Rale* ó Ypacahá.

¹ Tome XV pág. 251.