



SECOND SERIES.

VOL. I. No. 2.

SECOND QUARTER, 1905

A MAGAZINE OF NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY

Published Quarterly at Floral Park, N. Y.

Price, \$1.00 Per Year. 30 Cents Per Copy

PUBLISHED APRIL 20TH

JOHN LEWIS CHILDS, EDITOR

Plate III. Eggs of the Little Black Rail

BREEDING OF THE LITTLE BLACK RAIL, *Porzana jamaicensis*
IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

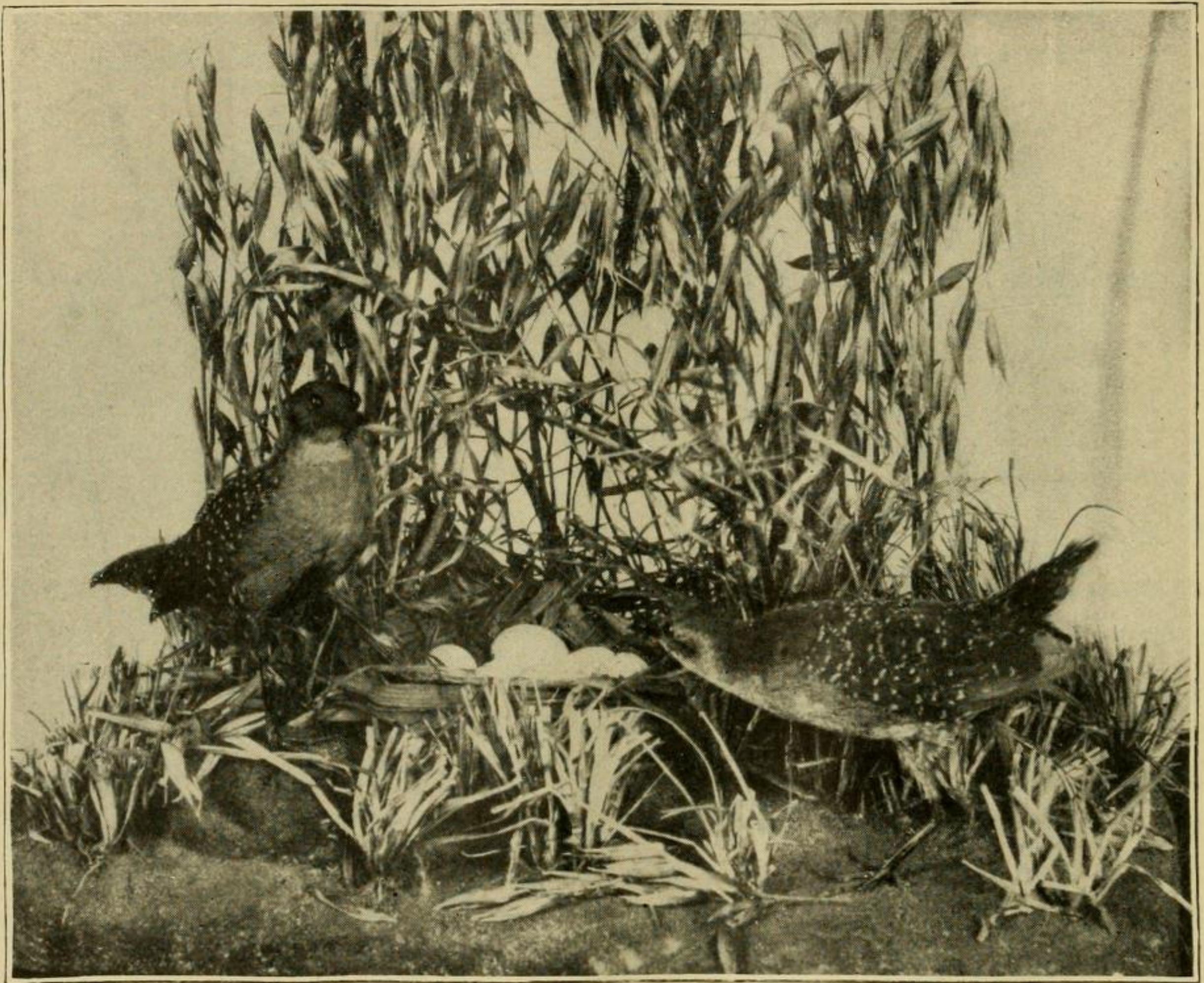
By Arthur T. Wayne

ON June 10th, 1903, a small negro boy came to me and said he had found eight eggs in a nest on the ground in an oat field, which was nearly cut over by a reaping and binding machine drawn by three mules. I questioned him closely and asked him if the eggs were unspotted as I supposed they were, of course, Partridge eggs, *Colinus virginianus*. He said the eggs were spotted and looked like Redbird's eggs, *Cardinalis cardinalis*, but added that he saw no bird on the nest and left the eggs undisturbed. When the boy adhered to his story that the eggs were spotted I immediately knew that the nest was that of the extremely rare Black Rail and I hastened with gun and collecting basket to the oat field which was less than one-fourth of a mile from my house.

He had not marked the spot where the nest was by any sign, therefore we had to hunt for it most carefully. I, at last, found it, and to my delight actually saw the female *on the nest*. It can be readily imagined with what pleasure I saw the parent incubating the eggs, as I was the *first* person who had *ever* seen this secretive bird *actually* on her nest! My first impulse was to catch her alive on her nest, and this could have been very easily accomplished as I was within an inch of her and with my hands outstretched it would have been a very easy matter to catch her. But I thought I would let her go and learn something of the song, habits and flight of these rare birds. Upon touching her she *ran* a short distance, then flew into a portion

of the oats which were not cut, but of a very small area. The nest contained eight eggs, and was built among the oats on high ground, and made entirely of the dry oat leaves arranged in a circular manner, but not arched over. It was 10:00 A. M. when she left the nest and I remained in the near vicinity until 11:00 A. M., when she again was found incubating. She ran, upon my approaching the nest, into the nearest cover of standing oats—about eighty yards away. So swiftly was this done that I had in mind a field mouse. Although the entire aspect of the field was changed the bird had no difficulty in finding her home.

As soon as she entered the standing oats she began to call, which notes



BLACK RAIL FAMILY GROUP, COLLECTED BY MR. WAYNE

resembled the words, *croo-croo-croo-o*, and then again almost exactly like the commencement of the song of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. This was answered at once by the male, but his song was very different and the notes may best be described by the words, *kik, kik, kik, kik*, or even *kuk, kuk, kuk, kuk*. As the birds were rare, and the field would be ploughed as soon as the oats were harvested, I determined to make every effort to capture both parents, after listening to the song of both birds for more than one hour.

I walked into the standing oats, and little did I dream of ever flushing one

of the birds, but to my great surprise one flushed almost immediately and with a squib charge of dust shot I killed it, which proved by dissection to be the female. I then tried to flush the male, (knowing the one I had was the female by the coloration) so as to be positive of the song of *both* sexes. After hunting for more than forty minutes I failed to flush the mate, so went home and skinned the one which I had secured.

At 3:00 o'clock P. M. I went in search of the male, accompanied by a friend, Lieut. J. D. Cozby, who brought with him his fine pointer dog. Although we heard the notes of the bird incessantly, which never changed from *kik, kik, kik, kik, or kuk, kuk, kuk, kuk*, it was absolutely impossible to flush him but once in two hours' careful search, when he flew into the oat stubble, but *ran* like a phantom into the standing oats. It was nearly 7:00 o'clock P. M. and I was fast losing hope of obtaining the male, when I saw the dog pointing, but the bird ran between Lieut. Cozby and myself, then flushed as it passed me. I quickly requested my friend to shoot and by a fortunate shot he succeeded in killing it. When it is realized that it required *four* hours' constant search in order to secure the male it can be understood how secretive the Rail is in its environment.

The eggs would all have hatched in four or five days, but with care and patience I preserved them. It seems almost miraculous that none of the eggs were injured, as the hoof-prints of seven feet were all around the nest and one had actually lifted the nest from the ground, but despite the fact that a huge mowing machine, drawn by three mules, had passed over the nest twice and cut the stubble close above it, not an egg was broken. The complete group, nest, eggs and birds, mounted by Hoyt, are now in the collection of Mr. Childs.

The three eggs of Little Black Rail shown on our plate are from the set of eight described by Mr. Wayne. Our plate is an exact representation of the set—accurate as regards size, color and markings—all being remarkably uniform.