

STILTS NESTING AT ARDMORE.

By A. F. STOKES, Ardmore, Papakura.

The first appearance of stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) on my farm at Ardmore, near Auckland, occurred about 1939, when one bird came for a short time before sunrise on each of two occasions. The next seen was in the spring of 1941, when one bird came frequently for about two hours each time. In the winter of 1943 a pair came and they stayed until late in December, but showed no signs of nesting. They were very timid.

1944 brought the first nest. A pair came in the winter and lived about a swampy place where I could observe them easily. These were much quieter. As spring progressed they chased my dog and vigorously pursued hawks. In November I found the nest of four eggs on a little mound in the swamp. The hatching took place early in December. Early one morning the first chick hatched. It left the nest about four hours later and was taken in charge by what I took to be the male bird. On the second and third mornings the same procedure occurred. The sitting bird stayed on the fourth egg for three more days before giving up. The egg was addled. For ten days the chicks kept together under the care of the male (?) bird, hiding quickly when he gave the alarm. After that time they would spread out as much as a chain apart. One now disappeared and then another two days later. I found a rat's nest nearby and killed the rat and its young. It had most likely killed the chicks. The third and last chick was nearly ready to fly when it developed a stiff neck on December 29. It ran in circles and finally died on January 1. The two old birds left on January 3, but came back with six others on January 5. The six stayed only for 10 minutes. The pair stayed all day, leaving in the evening for the last time.

In 1945 a pair, possibly the same, arrived in July—23rd, came for one hour; 24th, ditto; 25th, all day; 26th, did not come; 27th, all day; 28th, 29th, 30th, did not come; 31st, stayed for good. This time they nested in a wet area across a creek and at the mouth of a little gully. There were four eggs in the nest on October 26, but hatching was complete on October 27, and the young had left the nest. After leaving the nest the two old birds were on the wing most of the time, about 300 yards from the nest and across the creek. On October 31 I first saw one chick in a field next to last year's nest site. On November 1, I saw two, and on November 2 I saw three and on November 7 I first saw the four chicks all together. Here is a puzzle. The parents may have been quite able to move the newly-hatched chicks over grass fields for 300 yards in four days, but how did they get them across the creek? This creek is eight feet deep from the top of the bank to the water, about twenty-one feet wide at the top and about four feet wide on the water, which is three feet deep and is swift. There is no bridge. The banks are too steep and rough for the chicks to negotiate; a search revealing no possible crossing place. As far as I can see, the birds must have carried them over. The birds did not brood on any more than two at a time. On November 25 two were standing on the ground flapping their wings. On November 27 all four were doing this. On November 28 two flew about 100 yards, the others running to catch up. Two days later three were flying and the next day all four flew. On the

morning of December 5 they all left, but returned at noon. On December 6 they left again, returning at 2 p.m., one chick being missing. On December 7 they did not leave, but did so each day subsequently until December 18, when they left altogether. The chicks were then making a slight squeak. On March 29 two adult and four young stilts came. They were very tame and worked over the usual ground, even going through the same hole in the fence. Obviously it was the same family, the fourth chick having joined up again with the family.

There is no proof that it was the same birds which nested each year. The only good evidence in favour of this is that no other definite pairs came to this area. The young birds could easily have been banded but I had nothing with which to do this. I will watch for the old pair and four others next season.

BREEDING OF RED-BILLED GULL.

A PRELIMINARY CENSUS OF MOKOHINAU COLONY.

By C. A. FLEMING, Wellington.

Mokohinau, the most isolated of the island groups of the Hauraki Gulf, has long enjoyed the reputation among Auckland ornithologists of being the chief breeding colony for Red-billed Gulls (*Larus novae-hollandiae scopulinus*) in the greater part of the North Auckland peninsula. Between Cape Colville and North Cape there are, to my knowledge, some dozen rocks on which the species breed, or has bred at times, but it is very doubtful if any of these exceed a few hundred pairs of breeding birds. At the Three Kings, however, breeding has been reported and the numbers of birds seen in the close vicinity shortly after the breeding season (February, 1934) suggests that that colony might approach the size of the Mokohinau one. In the Bay of Plenty there are further colonies.

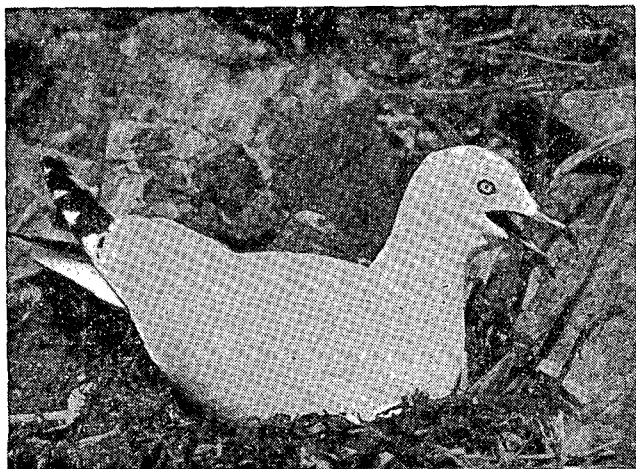


Photo: A. S. Wilkinson.

BROODING RED-BILLED GULL
Panting in heat of sun, Kapiti Island.