

STILTS NESTING AT ARDMORE, 1947-48 SEASON.

By A. F. Stokes, Ardmore, Papakura.

Three pairs of stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) nested here this season, two on my farm and one on Mr. Brown's farm. Although I can give no satisfactory proof, I am quite sure in my own mind that the original nesting pair of 1944 has returned and nested in the years 1945 and 1946. (See Vol. 2, No. 2, page 26, and Vol. 2, No. 8, page 185), and again now in 1947. The other pairs which have nested have not been so tame and did not have characteristics to mark them as did the first pair.

In my last account (Vol. 2, No. 8, page 185), No. 1 pair left with two flying young on February 2, 1947. The party of four was next seen here on August 17th, 1947. The young were grey about the head and still had their juvenile squeak. Visits were then made by the adult birds each day from August 19, to August 24. On August 25 and 26 the young ones came with them. Then on September 3, these model parents were seen following out the laws of nature by driving away their family and setting to work to build a nest at the old spot by my shed. This nest was built of mud and was finished on September 6. Mr. H. R. McKenzie had suggested that by numbering the eggs as they were laid I should be able to make probably a unique record of the incubation period. This I succeeded in doing. The following table will give the result:—

No.	Laid.	Hatched	
		Hour	Date
1	Sept. 6	1 p.m.	Oct. 5
2	Sept. 7	9 a.m.	Oct. 5
3	Sept. 8	Addled	
4	Sept. 10	9.30 a.m.	Oct. 5

The bird did not commence incubation until Sept. 10, the day No. 4 egg was laid. This explains the hatching of the three eggs on one day. The incubation period was 25 days. One odd point was that No. 2 egg was chipped for at least 26½ hours before the chick emerged, while the others must have chipped and hatched very quickly.

Another odd point to me is that the addled egg should have been No. 3. I should have thought that No. 1 or No. 4 should have had more chance of failure. Confusion of the numbers was impossible as I marked each egg the day it was laid, using indelible pencil, which was perfectly readable at the hatching time.

My duties as a kind of super foster-parent led me into conflict with a "rogue" harrier (*Circus approximans*). This hawk had learned that the stilts could not hurt it and that it could take the eggs if it could see them. It robbed No. 3 nest in Mr. Brown's farm and kept trying to find the other two nests. The two pairs of birds, chasing it for several days, were almost exhausted. I took my gun and hid in a gorse hedge until the hawk came along and I was able to shoot it. Other hawks in the area gave no trouble.

On the evening of Oct. 5 the three chicks were all still in the nest, together with the addled egg, No. 3. The next day they had all left and were under the watchful care of the male, as in previous hatchings. These three chicks made splendid progress, perhaps owing to their hatching early in the season and to the damp weather with its plentiful food supply.

On November 3, 29 days after hatching, the youngsters were making runs of about two yards and then flying about three yards. On Nov. 7 two of them flew quite strongly. H. R. McKenzie and F. Murray came this day to ring them. One made a good flight, but came up against a fence, when F. Murray, following up fast, made a good capture. The two others ran down the creek-bank and were caught in the creek. Red rings were placed on their left legs. When released they played the

usual deception of moving off in a seemingly leisurely manner and pretending to feed as they went.

The whole family flew away on Nov. 14. They all came back on May 20, 1948, and have remained to date, June 25. They are becoming so tame that they now come right up to the wicket gate by the back door of my house. The young, of course, still have the juvenile squeak and are grey about the head.

Another pair, which I shall call No. 2, nested at the swampy gully-mouth across the creek. This nest was nicely lined with rushes. On Sept. 10, 1947, a bird commenced sitting on 4 dark coloured eggs. Three eggs hatched before noon on Oct. 4. The three chicks were lost while trying to cross the creek.

This pair nested again in the wet patch by my shed. Three eggs, dark coloured like the last, were laid, and incubation commenced on Oct. 22. On the 24th I found that a fourth egg had been laid at some time since I saw the nest on the 22nd. On the 27th, one egg was missing. One chicken hatched at 7 a.m. on Nov. 14, a 23-day incubation period. It left the nest at 7.30 a.m. but returned at 5 p.m. Another egg was chipped on the 15th, but did not hatch until 5 p.m. on the 16th, when the chick left the nest. The third egg was addled. The two chicks were ringed on Dec. 11 with a red metal ring on the left leg and a yellow bakelite coil on the right leg. They flew on Dec. 22, 38 and 36 days respectively after hatching. The family flew away on Dec. 28, and has not since returned.

No. 3 pair had a short nesting history. They had two eggs on Sept. 6, but a hawk was seen taking them and the pair left altogether.

The only other stilts seen in the period were six adults which came for the day on September 6.

In the previous two articles the times for the periods of incubation and from hatching to flying are not correct, both dates having been included so that the periods are one day too long in each case. The following table gives the corrected periods and also the details of the 1947 season:—

SUMMARY OF INCUBATION PERIODS FROM 1945 TO 1947 INCLUSIVE.

No. 1 Pair—

1945—Dates not obtained.

1946—First clutch, 26, 26 and 27 days.

Second clutch, 25, 25, 24 and (?) 25 days. Incubation commenced when the second egg was laid.

1947—25, 25 and 25 days. Incubation commenced the day the fourth egg was laid.

No. 2 Pair—

1947—First clutch, 24, 24 and 24 days from commencement of incubation.

Second clutch, 23 and (?) 25 days. Incubation commenced the day the third egg was laid. One egg was addled, and one disappeared so a definite period cannot be fixed for the second one hatched, especially since an egg was laid either one or two days after incubation commenced.

SUMMARY OF PERIODS FROM HATCHING TO FLIGHT, 1945/1947.

No. 1 Broods—

1945—32, 34 and 35 days.

1946—31 days (?29 days for the last chick).

1947—29 days.

No. 2 Brood—

1947—38 and 36 days.