

- (a) Blacks are essentially solitary birds; not gregarious like Pies.
- (b) The nests of Blacks are usually widely separated; not in colonies as Pies tend to be.
- (c) Blacks prefer their own company to that of Pies.
- (d) Blacks, for preference, mate with Blacks or near-Blacks. One instance of Black x Pie is recorded.
- (e) Blacks change over when incubating much more frequently than Pies.
- (f) Blacks appear to place their nests in precarious positions more often than do Pies. Two of the six nests found looked very vulnerable (though one had hatched). One, after a very slight rise in the river, was found to be awash with the eggs submerged to a third of their depth. Whether harm came from this was not ascertained.
- (g) Blacks favour islands for nesting; more so than Pies.
- (h) Blacks are associated almost exclusively with river-beds. Only once were they seen elsewhere. This is by no means true of Pies in the same area.

None of this throws much light on the slow, remorseless decline of the *Black Stilt* which remains unsatisfactorily explained. Predation and alteration of habitat do not seem to be factors; neither does interference by man. Displacement by the more vigorous and successful Pie race could be a factor and there seems also to be a degree of breeding-out by a genetically dominant Pie pattern — this last evidently resisted in some measure by the Blacks as cross-breeding seems to be the exception. Whatever the cause, the fall in numbers over the last eight years is noticeable. I should be sorry to see the *Black Stilt* go. It is an attractive bird.



SHORT NOTE

LOW NESTING OF WHITE-FACED HERON

The impression gained from information published of the nesting habits of the White-faced Heron is a decided preference for rather high sites in eucalyptus or pine trees; the following nest record may well be of interest therefore owing to its siting.

Discovered on 18/3/66 on the lower reaches of the Matau branch of the Clutha River, the nest contained one addled egg, measuring 45 x 35 mm., the dried remains of one chick and two fully fledged young that flew the following day. The nest itself had been built on a willow branch that had grown horizontally from the river bank, the nest being some 36 feet from the bank and 8 feet or so above water, and composed totally of willow twigs. Viewed from the bank of the river the nest was at ground level.

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[Another point of note is the late season for young birds still to be in the nest. In northern New Zealand some White-faced Herons are already busy at their nests in June.—Ed.]