

SHORT NOTES

BLACK STILTS NESTING ON SWAMPY GROUND

In *New Zealand Birds*, 1955, Oliver tends to give the impression that the Black Stilt (*H. novaezealandiae*) nests only on riverbeds. That they may also use swampy ground is shown by two nests found near Omarama on 10/11/58.

Six Black Stilts were seen among a colony of twenty Pied Stilts in a long narrow swampy area winding through the tussock. All the stilts were concentrated in an area of no more than two acres. Of the Black Stilts one pair had a nest with four eggs; another pair had two recently hatched chicks estimated to be about 24 hours old; the third pair definitely had no nest. They may have had a grown chick or chicks but I do not think so. Five nests belonging to Pied Stilts were found. There may have been others; but having finally sorted out the Black Stilts, we did not search further.

A hide was erected at the nest of the Black Stilts (v. Plates XXVI and XXVII). Both birds incubated, changing over in sweltering heat about every 1½ hours. It really was hot. The Black Stilts just sat and panted with tongue hanging out and every feather lifted to let a little air reach the skin. Not far distant a pair of Pied Stilts had a nest, but the sitting bird here did not appear to be nearly so uncomfortably hot.

The Black Stilt is a more nicely proportioned bird than the Pied Stilt and with its bright red eye looks very handsome indeed. Voice and distraction display in the two species seem to be much the same; but these Black Stilts were considerably tamer than the usual run of Pied Stilts.

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TINY TERNS IN THE SOUTH ISLAND

On 15/11/58, a day of sunny but boisterous weather with a strong wind from the sea, I visited the north side of the Taramakau rivermouth, Westland, and found two very small terns such as I had never seen before. They would hover with quickly-beating wings before diving for food. From their flight and shape they looked like miniature Caspian Terns (*H. caspia*). Their tails were so short that they gave the impression of being sawn off. Their underparts were white except for dark towards the wing-tips. The forehead and the top of the head was white and when seen head-on this white area was most conspicuous. Below it was a black band, going round the nape and forward to the bill through the eye. The bill was black. They made a thin "teeth-whistle" call.

On the next day when I visited the rivermouth again, only one of them was seen; but I was able to confirm the notes which I had made when I first found them. These notes were submitted first to Mr. E. G. Turbott and then to Messrs. H. R. McKenzie and R. B. Sibson, all of whom agree that these small terns must belong to the *albifrons/nereis* group and that their plumage is that of immature birds or else adults in eclipse.

P. GRANT



[Photo by F. C. Kinsky

XXVI BLACK STILT (*Himantopus novaezealandiae*) approaching its nest and eggs. (v. note on page 163).



[Photo by M. F. Soper

XXVII Black Stilt incubating. The bird is panting from the heat.