

SHORT NOTES

A note on the nomenclature of the New Zealand stilts (*Himantopus*)

The most consistent feature of systematic assertions regarding the stilts (*Himantopus*) of New Zealand has been disagreement, two basic aspects being (1) the nature of the taxa (i.e., species, subspecies, or hybrids) and (2) the names to be applied to these taxa. Pierce (1984) has recently provided an extensive analysis of the nature of the taxa incorporating much new data. He concludes (in consensus with the literature of the past 25 years) that two taxa should be recognised, one of which, the Black Stilt, warrants full specific status. The names he uses for these taxa are *Himantopus himantopus leucocephalus* (Pied Stilt) and *H. novaeseelandiae* (Black Stilt). In this usage he follows current systematic practice in the Australasian region, at least since publication of the *Checklist of New Zealand birds* (Ornith. Soc. New Zealand 1953). However, Pierce does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the nomenclature used for New Zealand stilts and has overlooked a long-existing error. The purpose of the present note is to review the nomenclature used for these birds and correct the above mentioned error. A number of additional minor errors in the literature are discussed in the appendix.

Pierce (1984), from the context of his extensive knowledge of juvenile and hybrid plumages, has presented a good historical account of the confusion resulting from attempts to delimit the New Zealand stilt taxa over the past 150 years. At the extreme of splitting, Buller (1905) recognised four species of *Himantopus* in New Zealand (*albicollis*, *leucocephalus*, *melas*, *pictatus*). Peters (1934) represented the opposite extreme, lumping all New Zealand birds into a single subspecies, "*novae-zelandiae*", within his world-wide *H. himantopus*. In addition, at least six other specific names (including variant spellings) have been applied to these birds.

Table 1 lists the names that have been used for the New Zealand stilts along with the original description or first usage for each that I have been able to locate. Pierce's (1984) work has allowed the allocation of most New Zealand stilts described in the 19th and early 20th century literature to one or the other of the two taxa listed above or to hybrids between them, and these identifications are also indicated.

One name, *novaezealandiae* Gould, 1841, has been used in at least three different spellings, both with and without hyphens. Hyphens are not to be used in scientific names — International Code, Art. 32 (c) (i) — and will not be considered further in discussing variant spellings of *novaezealandiae*. This name has priority if the Black Stilt is to be considered a valid taxon as it predates *melas* Hombron and Jacquinot, 1841, by most of a year. By the International Code, Gould's original spelling (above) is the only form valid;

TABLE 1 — Specific names used for Pied and Black Stilts. Variant names using hyphens or capital letters are not listed

Year	Author	Name
PIED STILT		
1861	Ellman	<i>H. albus</i> Ellman
1865	Buller (<i>fide</i> Pierce 1984)	<i>H. leucocephalus</i> Gould
1930	Oliver	<i>H. leucocephalus albus</i> Ellman
1934	Peters	<i>H. himantopus novaezealandiae</i> Gould
1953	Ornith. Soc. New Zealand	<i>H. himantopus leucocephalus</i> Gould
BLACK STILT		
1841a	Gould	<i>H. novaezealandiae</i> Gould
1841	Hombron and Jacquinot	<i>H. melas</i> Hombron and Jacquinot
1844	Gray	<i>H. novaezealandiae</i> [<i>sic</i>] Gould
1861	Ellman	<i>H. niger</i> Ellman
1864	Schlegel	<i>H. novaezealandiae</i> [<i>sic</i>] Gould
1875	Buller	<i>H. albicollis</i> Buller
1934	Peters	<i>H. himantopus novaezealandiae</i> Gould
1970	Ornith. Soc. New Zealand	<i>H. novaezealandiae</i> [<i>sic</i>] Gould
Names not attributable to either species		
1861	Ellman	<i>H. picatus</i> Ellman (<i>nomen dubium</i>)
1872	Potts	<i>H. spicatus</i> Potts (hybrid)

the others (*novaezealandiae* and *novaezeelandiae*) are incorrect subsequent spellings — International Code, Art. 33 (b) — and so have no status in nomenclature and should never be used.

In summary, the correct epithet for the taxon comprising the New Zealand stilt populations called by the English name of Black Stilt is *novaezealandiae*.

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APPENDIX

The following comments also concern the names used for the New Zealand Stilts.

1. If the New Zealand population of the Pied Stilt is to be considered distinct from the Australian *leucocephalus*, the oldest available name is *albus* (Ellman 1861).
2. As pointed out by Pierce (1984), Ellman (1861) provided insufficient description for his *H. picatus* to permit certain identification as either Pied or Black Stilt. Thus, *picatus* is a *nomen dubium* and cannot confidently be assigned to the synonymy of either form.
3. Pierce (1984) also pointed out that the description of *spicatus* Potts, 1872, refers to hybrids. This name is thus not available for any taxon.
4. Buller (1875) proposed *albicollis* for (as it turns out) the Black Stilt. This name is preoccupied, having been used by Vieillot (1817) for *H. himantopus*.
5. The original descriptions of *H. leucocephalus* and *H. novaeseelandiae* are found in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (Gould 1837, 1841a) published in January of the respective years, not in the *Synopsis of the birds of Australia* (Gould 1837b; for *leucocephalus*) or *The birds of Australia* (Gould 1841b; for *novaeseelandiae*) as cited by, for example, Gray (1871), Matthews (1927), Oliver (1930), Peters (1934), and Oliver (1955). Part II of the *Synopsis* was not published until at least March of 1837 (despite the date listed in the volume), and Part IV of *The birds of Australia* was not issued until September of 1841 (Sauer 1982).

6. Pierce (1984) indicated (in his Table 5) that Peters (1934) recognised two species of stilts in New Zealand (listed as *H. him* [antopus] *leuco* [cephalus] and *H. h. novae* [zealandiae] (sic) in the table). Peters specifically stated (p. 289, footnote) that he did not believe there to be two species of stilts in New Zealand. He referred all New Zealand birds to *H. himantopus novaezealandiae*. In the same table (footnote 1), Pierce (1984) stated that Ellman's descriptions of stilts were referred to the genus *Hypsibates*. This is incorrect, as Ellman (1861) used *Himantopus*.
7. Sharpe (1896) cited the illustration in Reichenbach (1850) as referring to the Pied Stilt (see Sharpe's synonymy of *H. picatus*). the coloured plate in question is labelled 1045-46 and clearly refers to one species. Since one of the two is completely black and the other mostly so they are obviously *novaezealandiae*. Meyer's (1879) compilation supports this interpretation.



SHORT NOTE

Predation of an arboreal rat by a New Zealand Falcon

At 11.30 a.m. on 13 February 1984 I encountered a New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) in mixed beech-podocarp forest on the Cole Creek track, Mataketake State Forest, South Westland. The Falcon was initially perched on a large branch in the canopy of a silver beech (*Nothofagus menziesii*), but it soon moved into a large rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) about 20 m high and for two minutes moved around the small branches and twigs searching continuously. It then flew rapidly into a large epiphyte (*Astelia* sp.) 15 m up in the crook of the same tree. There was a loud crash, pieces of vegetation fell out of the rimu, and then the falcon flew off to the original beech carrying a rat (*Rattus* sp.) in its talons.

The falcon perched on a large branch and appeared to prod the rat with its beak. I could not determine whether the rat was eaten because my view was partly obscured, but about a minute later the Falcon flew into a second rimu without the carcass and searched through the tree. At 11.38 a.m., five minutes after catching the rat, the Falcon flew into the canopy of this tree and caught a Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*) on the wing from a flock feeding in the foliage.

As far as I am aware this is the first record of an arboreal rat being taken by a New Zealand Falcon.

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