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Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Pied stilt: pp 147-148.



PIED STILT.

Family Recurvirostridae

Species *Himantopus himantopus*

Common names Pied Stilt, Poaka

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 350 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Pied Oystercatcher 460 mm)

Habitat Estuaries, harbours with muddy fringes, wet areas, swamp verges and pastureland. Generally breeds inland although sometimes on coastal fringes. Many birds migrate to northern coastal areas over the winter months.

New Zealand range Found throughout New Zealand where wet habitat is

available.

Discussion The Pied Stilt is a race of the worldwide genus of Black-winged Stilts which is thought to have invaded New Zealand only since the arrival of the first Europeans. It is now widespread and is known to have interbred with New Zealand's endemic species, the Black Stilt. (See Black Stilt article.)

Similarity to Black-winged Stilts. The Pied Stilt is similar to other black-winged stilts but with the addition of an area of black at the back of the head which extends down the nape to a white collar separating it from the black of the wings.

Description

Back of neck and wings Black, separated by a white collar. **Head and underparts** White. **Bill** Black. **Legs** Pinkish.

Description – immature

Head White with varying amounts of smudgy black. **Wings** Black, but paler than the adult bird. **Underparts** White.

Conspicuous features

- Immaculate bird of black and white.
- Long pinkish legs.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Frequently flies at night indicated by loud calling.
- Harasses and scolds intruders who come near to the nesting site.

Colour variations. Many New Zealand stilts have variable black colouration. These are hybrid birds, of varying degrees, resultant from a history of interbreeding with Black Stilts. Immature birds also show some colour variation.

Call A high-pitched “yep, yep, yep”, barking noise.

Nest Sometimes a colonial nester but often solitary making a cup-shaped nest of grasses on a mound. Up to 4 greenish, blotched with brown eggs are laid.

From P. 149

Differences in nesting habits of Black and Pied Stilts The increase in Pied Stilt numbers has paralleled the decline of the Black Stilt, even though Black Stilt and Pied Stilt occupy different nesting niches, with Black Stilt preferring shingle river-beds and Pied Stilt swamp verges, wetlands and coastal areas. Reasons for this decline have not been clearly established although a reduction in breeding habitat, plus predation by mustelids, rats and cats, on a species adapted to a predator-free environment, with associated slower maturing fledglings, has had something to do with it. Current interbreeding between Black Stilts and Pied Stilts is also suggested as another cause.

Note on melanism. Fleming (1982) noted that the Black Stilt had “followed the tendency to melanism common among New Zealand species (New Zealand

shags, oystercatchers, wekas, robins, tits and fantails)”. He suggested this had come about because “a species in a predator-free land could relax the need for countershading or disruptive plumage patterns”.

Where to find

General – A common species which can be found in many rural and coastal environments. They tend to nest inland.

North Auckland – Whangaparaoa around Orewa Estuary, Weiti River and at the Shakespear Park at the pond and along the coast. P. 294.

Auckland – Found on the upper reaches of the Waitemata Harbour, Hobson Bay, Tahuna Torea and Howick Beach. P. 298.

South Auckland – Manukau Harbour in large numbers during winter in many parts of the harbour. Birds often change harbours at night when they can be heard flying overhead making their barking calls. P. 298.

South Auckland – Large numbers can be seen at Miranda in winter at the “Stilt Ponds”. They can be quite a spectacle. P. 302.