SUCCESSFUL BREEDING OF BLACK-NECKED STILTS IN SASKATCHEWAN

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The first successful breeding of Blacknecked Stilts in Saskatchewan was observed near the village of Bradwell in summer 1989. Three young were fledged. The first confirmed breeding record in the province was in 1987 at Blackstrap Reservoir, just southwest of the 1989 site, but the eggs were lost. probably to avian predation. 5 A breeding record from Qu'Appelle in 1894, based on collected eggs, is now considered suspect.2 The 1989 nesting was on an alkaline slough southeast of Bradwell and just west of Bradwell Reservoir. The slough is divided by a north-south grid road used frequently by people travelling to the reservoir to fish. The nest was located on a grass- and reed-covered island in the center of the western part of the slough.

A single stilt was originally spotted by Craig and Lorriene Salisbury at 7:00 p.m. on 5 June 1989, feeding on the shore east of the road. The unique shape and coloration of the bird left no doubt as to its identity, which was confirmed by the Peterson field guide.3 Members of the Saskatoon Natural History Society were notified and the sighting was again confirmed. On 6 June John Patterson spotted a single stilt sitting on the island. Because of the cool and windy weather, it was not clear if the bird was on a nest or simply seeking shelter. However, it flew up several times to chase two gulls flying overhead

and then returned to the same resi site each time. On 8 June Craig Sa bury also spotted the bird sitting on island. It left the resting position to f on the shore of the island and sevitimes scolded American Avocets feing nearby. After approximately 5 n utes the stilt returned to the same lc. tion on the island and used its bill arrange materials under its body be carefully lowering itself. Several r utes later a second stilt flew in and be feeding near the resting bird. From the observations it was concluded that birds were incubating. The stilts was sharing the island with several pair f nesting avocets.

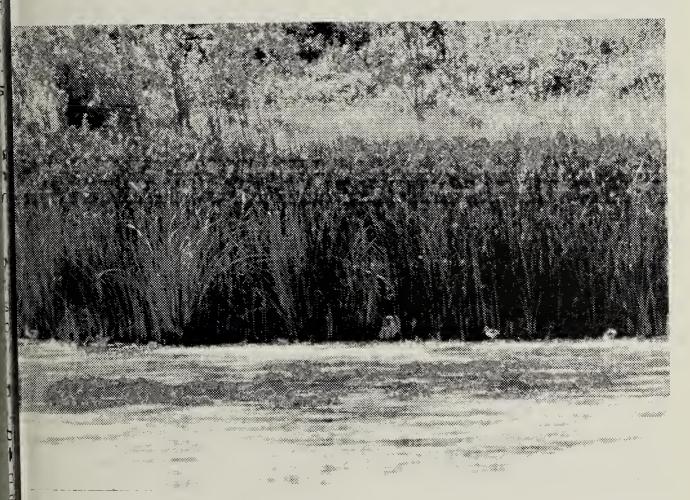
During the next 3 weeks the pair sobserved frequently by the authors, so usual pattern being one bird feeding of the other on the nest.

On 1 July both adults were spot feeding east of the road. Two Frank's Gulls were seen hovering several ters above the nest site, but they did land and soon flew away. On 3 July, odowny young were spotted in the resalong the shore of the eastern part of slough, with one parent feeding near On 16 July, at 9:30 a.m., three chinow approaching two-thirds adult showere observed and photographed from with the adults in the same areal land south the same area land south the same areal land south the same area land s



ack-necked Stilts, one on nest and one in water

Craig Salisbury



ck-necked Stilts, downy young in water

Craig Salisbury

breeding site. The other parent and three chicks were feeding on the rapidly drying breeding slough. By 5 August all had moved to the freshwater slough, although only two chicks could be located. Two adults and two young, now nearly fully grown and displaying a drab version of the adult plumage, were last seen on the freshwater slough on 18 August. None was observed in the area afterwards and it was assumed that they had migrated.

Discussion

The normal breeding range of Black-necked Stilts includes the west and midwest United States and its gulf and southeastern coasts.² In western Canada only isolated observations have been reported.¹ Godfrey suggested that drought conditions in the normal breeding range accounted for breeding records in Montana and Alberta in 1977.² The drought conditions suffered in the midwest United States over the past 3 years are presumably a factor in this Saskatchewan breeding record.

Wedgwood and Taylor were troubled by the predation of the nest reported in 1987, citing the passive nature of the breeding pair and human activity as possible causes.⁵ The birds described in this report reacted more aggressively to intruders such as gulls and neighbouring avocets and also to human activity. Although exposed continually to significant motor vehicle traffic, the stilts re-

sponded to stopped vehicles with equent alarm calls and, in one instale. when one of the authors left a velle, one adult approached with head low a and wings spread while calling lov This defensive behaviour intensed when the chicks appeared. Becaul of this, the authors made no attempt to sit the nest and limited the duration of ts to the breeding area. The location die nest in the centre of a slough surround with barbed wire probably discourted visits to the nest by other observers. 1e 1987 nest at Blackstrap was locate 21 m from a grid road and was more ac ssible. Colonial nesters, the stilts 30 likely benefitted from the presence cate nesting pairs of avocets on the isla in keeping natural predators away.

¹CHAPMAN, B., J. P. GOOSEN a I. OHANJANIAN. 1985. Occurrences of E knecked Stilts, *Himantopus mexicani* in western Canada. *Can. Field-Nat.* 99 4-257.

²GODFREY, W. E. 1986. The birds of inada. National Mus. of Canada, Ottawa 95 pp.

³PETERSON, R. T. 1980. A field guide he birds. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. 38 p.

⁴SCOTT, S. L. 1983. A field guide to the ds of North America. National Geo. Soc., Vahington. 464 pp.

⁵WEDGWOOD, J. A. and P. S. TAY R. 1988. Black-necked Stilts in Saskatche in Blue Jay 46:80-83.