

## BLACK-NECKED STILT.

†HIMANTOPUS NIGRICOLLIS, Vieill.

PLATE CCCLIV.—ADULT MALE.

A few individuals of this singular species occasionally pass the winter in the lower parts of Louisiana, especially in the section called Oppellousas. I have also found it at the same period in the Floridas, but the greater number follow the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, and proceed beyond our southern limits. In April 1837, I observed their first appearance at Galveston Bay in Texas, where many remained until our departure. They were in small flocks, seldom composed of more than seven or eight individuals, which almost immediately separated into parties of two or three, and commenced their search for food. They kept about the small shallow brackish ponds on the islands of the bay, and now and then were observed following the sinuosities of bayous in company with other birds. They were much more shy than they are while breeding, and it was with some difficulty that we procured specimens. When one was killed, the rest would fly to a considerable distance, sometimes from one island to another, in a rapid manner, with regular beats of the wings, their necks and legs extended. On such occasions they uttered a whistling cry, different from the *cleek, cleek, cleek*, which they emit when they have nests or young.

All the writers who have described the habits of this bird, allege that it walks with a "staggering gait;" but this is by no means the case, for they appeared to us to walk as firmly as other long-legged birds, such as Herons, Curlews, and the American Avoset; and I had many opportunities of observing them, as had my friend EDWARD HARRIS, my son, and all the members of our party.

Toward the end of April, flocks of this bird reach the Middle Districts, by following the coast, for they are very rarely met with at any great distance from the sea-shore. They generally betake themselves to extensive marshes abounding in muddy inlets and small ponds, in the vicinity of which they usually place their nests. About the middle of May, parties of from ten to twenty collect, and are seen wading sometimes up to their breast, in search of food, which is extremely abundant in such places. They are now paired, and select suitable spots for their nests, which are generally not far distant from each other, and near the margins of the ponds, or on small

islets. The nest is very similar to that of the Willet, or Semi-palmated Snipe, *Totanus semipalmatus*, being rather large, and formed of dry weeds and the twigs of small shrubs. I have never observed the singular manner of augmenting and raising their tenements, described by ALEXANDER WILSON, although, like him, I have found and examined several in the very same districts. The eggs are always four, placed with the smaller ends together, pyriform, almost 2 inches long, with the smaller end rounded,  $1\frac{3}{8}$  in their greatest breadth, of a pale yellowish-clay colour, and plentifully marked with large irregular blotches and lines of brownish-black.

While the females are sitting, the males pay them much attention, acting in this respect like those of the American Avocet, watching the approach of intruders, giving chase to the Red-winged Starlings, as well as to the Fishing and American Crows, and assailing the truant young gunner or egger. When there is no appearance of annoyance, they sometimes roam as far as the sea-beach. When the young are hatched, they leave the nest, and follow their parents through the grass, but on the appearance of danger squat and remain motionless. About the beginning of September, young and old commence their journey southward.

This species is rather scarce along the shores of the Carolinas; nor is it abundant in any part of the United States, and is seldom seen to the eastward beyond Long Island. Its food consists of insects, small crustacea, worms, and young fry of fishes. I have frequently observed them running after flies, and attempting to seize the smaller Libellulæ. When wounded so as to fall on the water, they are unable to dive, but on reaching the shore they run nimbly off and hide themselves.

I feel confident that in spring the males migrate apart from the females, but in autumn in company with them. The flesh of this species is not decidedly good or bad, being of ordinary quality. The males are larger than the females, and individuals of both sexes vary considerably in size.

LONG-LEGGED AVOCET, *Recurvirostra Himantopus*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vii. p. 48.

HIMANTOPUS NIGRICOLLIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 322.

BLACK-NECKED STILT, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 8.

BLACK-NECKED STILT, *Himantopus nigricollis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iv. p. 247.

Male,  $14\frac{1}{2}$ , 27. Female, 14,  $25\frac{3}{4}$ .

Rather common in Texas during spring. Breeds on different parts of the Atlantic coast, as far as Long Island. A few spend the winter about the mouths of the Mississippi. Migratory.

Adult Male.

Bill about twice as long as the head, very slender, roundish, tapering, slightly recurved. Upper mandible with its outline very slightly curved

upwards, at the tip declinate; the ridge convex, the sides convex, the edges sharp and inflected, the tip narrow and rather acute. Nasal groove nearly half the length of the bill; nostrils linear, direct, sub-basal, pervious. Lower mandible with the angle very long and narrow, the sides grooved as far as the angle, the edges sharp and inflected, the tip narrow.

Head small, ovate, rounded above; neck very long and slender; body rather compact. Legs extremely elongated and slender; tibia bare for more than half its length, covered anteriorly with large curved scutella; tarsus very long, moderately compressed, scutellate before, reticulate on the sides; toes of moderate length, slender; hind toe wanting, outer a little longer than inner, and connected with the middle toe by a web extending nearly to the second joint; the inner toe also connected with the middle by a very short web. Claws small, nearly straight, moderately compressed.

Plumage ordinary, the feathers ovate and rounded. Wings very long, of moderate breadth, acute, the first quill longest, the other primaries rapidly graduated. Tail short, even, of twelve feathers.

Bill black, iris bright carmine; feet lake-coloured, claws dusky. Fore-head, a spot above the eye, another below it, fore part and sides of the neck, and all the other lower parts, pure white. Upper part of head, hind neck, and upper parts, bluish-black, glossed with green; tail white.

Length to end of tail  $14\frac{1}{2}$  inches, to end of wings  $16\frac{1}{2}$ , to end of claws  $21\frac{3}{4}$ ; extent of wings 27; wing from flexure 9; tail  $2\frac{10}{12}$ ; bill along the ridge  $2\frac{8}{12}$ , along the edge of lower mandible  $2\frac{11}{12}$ ; bare part of tibia  $3\frac{1}{4}$ ; tarsus  $4\frac{2\frac{1}{2}}{12}$ ; middle toe  $1\frac{1}{2}$ , its claw  $\frac{3}{12}$ . Weight  $6\frac{1}{4}$  oz.

The Female is smaller than the male but otherwise similar.

Length to end of tail 14 inches, to end of wings  $15\frac{1}{4}$ , to end of claws 20; extent of wings  $25\frac{3}{4}$ . Weight 5 oz.

The median ridge of the anterior part of the roof of the mouth is furnished with a few short papillæ. The tongue is 1 inch 2 twelfths long, slender, tapering, emarginate and papillate at the base. The œsophagus is 7 inches long, with an average diameter of 4 twelfths; the proventriculus 9 twelfths long, and 6 twelfths in diameter. The stomach is elliptical, 1 inch in length,  $8\frac{1}{2}$  twelfths in breadth, its lateral muscles of moderate strength, the right being 4 twelfths thick; the inner coat or epithelium dense, longitudinally rugous, and of a brownish-red colour. The intestine is 20 inches long, its diameter varying from 3 to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  twelfths. The cœca are  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long,  $\frac{1}{12}$  in diameter at the base, 2 twelfths towards the end, which is blunt.

The trachea is  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches long, rather wide, its diameter at the upper part 3 twelfths, gradually diminishing to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  twelfths; the rings 120, unossified, excepting a few at the lower part. The contractor muscles are feeble; the

sterno-tracheal slender. The bronchi are very short, with about 10 half rings.

The Prince of MUSIGNANO has introduced into his lately published list a species of this genus, under the name of *Himantopus Mexicanus*. I have received from Florida two skins, which from their large size might at first sight be thought to differ from the common kind; but after closely comparing them with my other specimens, I can find no difference indicative of a distinction of species. Nor have I ever met with individuals in North America of any other species than that above described.

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GENUS X.—NUMENIUS, *Briss.* CURLEW.

Bill very long, slender, sub-cylindrical, slightly compressed, more or less arcuate or decurved; upper mandible with the ridge broad and flattened at the base, broad and rounded in the rest of its extent, a deep groove running from the nostrils to near the tip, which is decurved, enlarged so as to form an oblong obtuse knob, projecting beyond the point of the lower mandible, the edges rounded; lower mandible similar in its curvature to the upper, its angle extremely narrow, and extending to near the middle, the ridge rounded, the sides with a shallow groove to near the end, the edges directly meeting those of the upper, the tip obtuse. Head rather small, oblong, compressed; neck long; body compact. Feet long; tibia bare below; tarsus scaly above, scutellate for two-thirds; toes rather small, scutellate, first very small, lateral nearly equal. Claws small, compressed, blunted. Wings long, very acute, the first quill longest, some of the inner secondaries greatly elongated. Tail short, much rounded, of twelve rounded feathers.



C.P.

*Black Necked Stilt*

*Male*

*Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon, F.R.S. F.L.S.*

*Lith. & Printed & Col<sup>d</sup> by J. T. Bowen Phila.*



Audubon, John James. 1843. "Black-Necked Stilt, *Himantopus nigricollis*, Vieill. [Pl. 354]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 6, 31–34. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319468>.

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