Short communications

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus himantopus*, a new shorebird for Indonesia

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The taxonomy and species limits in the stilt genus *Himantopus* are unsettled. Most authors have preferred to accept only two species, the Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and the Black Stilt *Himantopus novaezelandiae*, although some consider these two conspecific. However, the Black-winged Stilt is normally divided into five subspecies, and these forms are sometimes considered to constitute three to five separate species. These include the nominate *himantopus* of Europe, Africa and Asia; *leucocephalus*, the Pied Stilt of Australia; *mexicanus*, the Black-necked Stilt of Central and South America; *melanurus*, the White-backed Stilt of central South America and *knudseni*, the Hawaiian Stilt of Hawaii (Pierce 1996). Sonobe & Usui (1993) and Robson (2005) distinguished Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* as a separate species from Australian White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus*, although most other authors (e.g. Cramp & Simmons 1983, Hayman *et al.* 1986, Inskipp *et al.* 1996 and Pierce 1996) treat *leucocephalus* as a subspecies of *Himantopus himantopus.* More information on the distribution of this species (or subspecies) is required before any firm conclusions can be made regarding its range (Lopez & Mundkur 1997).

Most Indonesian references treat Australian White-headed Stilt as a full species (e.g. Andrew 1992, Behleer *et al.* 2001, Mackinnon *et al.* 1998, Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007, White & Bruce 1986). We follow this treatment here. In addition to the taxonomic considerations, we think an advantage of treating Black-winged Stilt and Australian White-headed Stilt separately is that it will result in more careful monitoring and improved population estimates for use in the reviews of global and local shorebird populations developed by Wetlands International (Bamford *et al.* 2008, Wetland International 2006).

On 21 Oct 2007 at 0754h, AN observed and photographed (Fig. 1) a juvenile stilt on a fishpond at Jeulingke village in the Syiah Kuala sub-district of Banda Aceh City (5°34'35"N, 95°20'25"E). He initially identified the bird as an Australian White-headed Stilt, which had not previously been recorded in Aceh province. However, it is very difficult to separate juvenile Black-winged and Australian White-headed Stilts. Robson (2005) stated that on current knowledge first year immature Australian White-headed Stilts are indistinguishable from non-breeding adult White-headed Stilt in Sumatra (Iqbal 2008), MI considered that the bird was a juvenile Black-winged Stilt. This appears to be consistent with statements and photos in some field guides. Although all such guides make it clear that adult Black-winged Stilts lack any black on the hind-neck, few show that the juvenile has a broader brownish-grey crown and hind-neck compared with that of a juvenile Australian White-headed Stilt (Robson 2005, Rosair & Cottridge 1995, Sonobe & Usui 1993). In addition, the head pattern of the bird shown in Fig. 1 is very similar to that of a picture of a juvenile Black-winged Stilt in Robson (2005) and the overall pattern resembles that shown in a photo of a juvenile Black-winged Stilt in Rosair & Cottridge (1995) and is unlike a photo of a juvenile *leucocephalus* in the same book.

On 14 Jan 2009 at 18h00, HA observed a flock of 28 stilts on a flooded, harvested rice-field at Bagan Serdang village, Pantai Labu sub-district, Deli Serdang District, North

Fig 1. A juvenile stilt thought to be a Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (*himantopus*) at Jeulingke, Aceh, Indonesia, on 21 Oct 2007 (photo: Agus Nurza).

Fig 2. An adult male Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (*himantopus*) in breeding plumage with completely white head and neck (right) accompanied by a juvenile on 14 Jan 2009 at Bagan Serdang, North Sumatra (photo: Hasri Abdillah).

North Sumatra province, Indonesia (3°42'03"N, 98°50'05"E). There were at least 10 adult Black-winged Stilts accompanied by juveniles. There were four distinct plumages: adult non-breeding, male breeding, female breeding and juveniles (Fig. 2).

There is no previous fully validated report of Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (*himantopus*) in Indonesia (Andrew 1992, 1993, Kukila 2000, Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007), although a mixed stilt flock containing 48 Australian White-headed Stilts and two Black-winged Stilts was reported near the floating village of Tanjung Haur on Lake Jempang (East Kalimantan) during 16–20 Oct 2004 (Robson 2005). This record has been accepted in recent Borneo bird-lists for Kalimantan (Mann 2008, Myers 2009), although Phillipps & Phillipps (2009) did not include it in their list. We have contacted the observer who reported Black-winged Stilts in East Kalimantan, Christian Goenner, and his photo proves that he did record a male Black-winged Stilt in breeding plumage in 2004. Therefore our second record of Black-winged Stilt in Indonesia suggests that the species/subspecies may be of more than casual occurrence in the country. Most reports of Black-winged Stilts from Indonesia (e.g. Coates & Bishop 2000, Li & Mundkur 2004, Marle & Voous 1988) refer to Australian White-headed Stilt *H. leucocephalus*. Observation of Black-winged Stilt in North Sumatra supports our suggestion that the first observation of a juvenile stilt in Aceh was of a Black-winged Stilt. Before these observations were made, Black-winged Stilt had not been listed as an Indonesian species (Andrew 1992, 1993, Kukila 2000, Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007).

The occurrence of a Black-winged Stilt in fresh juvenile plumage in North Sumatra on 14 Jan 2009 suggests the possibility that the species/subspecies may have bred in Bagan Serdang or a nearby area. The occurrence of a juvenile Black-winged Stilt in Aceh also supports this hypothesis. White-headed Stilts breed regularly in Southern Sumatra (Iqbal 2008; Iqbal *et al.* 2009). Further observations are needed to determine whether both species/subspecies breed in Bagan Serdang or in other parts of Northern Sumatra. If both species nest in the same places with limited or no hybridisation, then they should be considered separate species.

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Contrasting reactions to human disturbance in Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* on the south coast of Norway

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We report contrasting reactions to human disturbance by Eurasian Oystercatchers breeding on the south coast of Norway. In two cases the birds showed tolerance and habituation, but in a third the birds showed increasing intolerance and alarm.

Several studies discuss the effect of human activity and the presence of predators on the breeding success and behaviour of birds (e.g. Beale & Monaghan 2004, Drewitt 2007, Sutherland 2007). Although to date no studies have shown direct responsibility of human activity for systematic oystercatcher nest failure, human recreation has been associated with reduced breeding success (Adams *et al.* 1999, Hockey 1987, Jeffery 1987, Leseberg *et al.* 2000, Mayers & Schweitzer 2003, McGowan & Simons 2006, Moore 2003, Stillman & Goss-Custard 2002, Verhulst *et al.* 2001). A few studies have shown that oystercatchers may alter their behaviour to counter these effects, which is consistent with the characteristic plasticity of the oystercatcher's behaviour; for example in relation to feeding (Hockey 1979, Lauro & Nol 1995, Norton-Griffiths 1969, Safriel 1985, Sutherland *et al.* 1996) and choice of nest site (Briggs 1984, Golumbia *et al.* 2009, Heppleston 1972, Hockey 1982). Such "counter measures" may include habituation to non-threatening human activities. According to the literature, oystercatchers typically alarm, feign injury and display other distractive behaviours when humans approach during the chick stage (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Munro 1984). In the course of a study of the breeding success of Eurasian Oystercatchers on the south coast of Norway, we observed two pairs of Eurasian Oystercatchers that showed behavioural adaptations to human activity such that birds did not leave their nests or alarm for their chicks despite people approaching or being in close proximity, but we also recorded a third pair that showed increasing intolerance and alarm.

The first observation was of a pair of oystercatchers that bred in the middle of a roundabout or traffic circle on a minor road between the museum and the commercial fishing-vessel pier in Borhaug, Vest-Agder, Norway, in 2006. The road was not busy but the birds did not react to cars being driven past or to cars being parked nearby. This behaviour enabled us to place a walk-in trap over the nest and trap both adults for ringing within just 20 minutes (including the time it took to ring and process the first bird). We made observations on this pair from a car parked less than 20 m from the nest. (They returned to the same area the following breeding season, but did not nest in the same location.) That the pair did not react to the presence of our car was not so surprising, but the fact that they did not react to the presence of both the car and the walk-in trap over the nest which enabled us to capture the pair so quickly was remarkable.

The second observation was of a pair of oystercatchers that had nested on a small rocky island or skerry in a cove with several old houses, summer homes and boat houses in the archipelago near the town of Farsund, Vest-Agder, Norway. There was a considerable amount of small recreational boat traffic in the cove. In 2006, the pair successfully hatched two eggs and each of the four times we visited the family, to obtain growth measurements of the chicks, the pair only started alarming once we had landed on the island. They seemed to be completely indifferent to boat traffic even when it was close to the nest or to the chicks. On one occasion we thought that they had lost their chicks to predation because the parents were completely silent when we landed. We searched the skerry for the chicks but could

not find them. The parents did not start alarming before we crossed the skerry and approached them. When we walked back toward the boat, we found one chick only four metres from where we had landed and where a meter of the chick without seeing it, and without the parents showing any sign of alarm.

The third observation is of a pair that showed a completely different reaction to disturbance.

During 2006 and 2007, we monitored about 80 pairs of oystercatchers in the archipelago between Lista and Lindesnes on the south coast of Norway in order to determine the influence of human activity on breeding success and chick growth. To do this we used a motor boat to travel between breeding territories on the different islets and skerries. We visited pairs regularly to note breeding activity and to capture chicks to weigh and measure them for analyses of growth. All pairs responded to our approaches (the reaction mostly determined by whether the pair had eggs, chicks or were not actively breeding). Some pairs apparently came to recognise our boat after we had made several visits.

One pair nested in the inner section of the archipelago where it was the most affected by human disturbance. The nest was perched precariously on top of a small very steep rocky outcrop about three meters offshore. The same nest-cup was used in 2006 and 2007 and both seasons they successfully raised chicks.

Each year, we monitored the chicks' growth and after the first visit to measure the chicks, the parents would start alarming and flying towards the boat while we were still quite far away from their territory. This distance became greater with each visit over the period before the young could fly. By the time the chicks were close to fledging the parents would fly out to the boat making alarm calls when we were still 200 m or more from the nest. They would also do this when we were just driving past with no intention of stopping and measuring the chicks; on these occasions they would follow the boat closely before turning back after a few hundred meters. Just before the chicks fledged in 2007, one of the adults followed the boat for about two kilometres, apparently trying to chase us from the breeding territory, though we were simply passing by. For most of this distance, the bird flew as fast as the boat (55–65 kph).

It was unfortunate that this breeding territory was in the inner section of the archipelago near the town of Farsund where we moored the boat. In order to study the oystercatchers in the area we usually needed to drive the boat past this territory. Although a large number of small boats of the same size, colour and make constantly passed their breeding site, the parent oystercatchers had somehow learned to identify our boat since they chose to alarm at us rather than any other boat that came near.

We believe that all three of the pairs of Eurasian Oystercatchers discussed here were accustomed to boat or vehicular traffic and close contact with people, but while two behaved as if they do not consider humans a threat to themselves or to their eggs or chicks the third reacted rather differently to our presence and rather more like the oystercatchers that nest in the outer archipelago, where humans and boat traffic are less frequent and habituation is less likely.

The impact of human disturbance on waders and the role of habituation warrant further investigation.

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