

**FIRST NESTING RECORD FOR THE BLACK-NECKED STILT
(*HIMANTOPUS MEXICANUS*) IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY**

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The Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) is an easily recognized species that is primarily coastal in the Southeast (AOU 1998). In Alabama, it is an uncommon transient along the Gulf Coast, breeds at the head of Mobile Bay, and is casual on the Coastal Plain (Imhof 1976). In the Tennessee Valley there have been at least five sightings (Table 1), but no evidence of breeding had been reported prior to the nest described in this paper.

On 16 May 1998, a pair of Black-necked Stilts was seen foraging and copulating at an estimated 20 ha (49 acre) sinkhole pond along Marthaler Lane (Figure 1), approximately five km (3.1 miles) northwest of Leighton, Colbert County, Alabama. On 20 May, a pair was suspected of nesting on a small [approx. 0.25 ha (0.61 acre)] island at the northwest corner of the pond. The island was visited on the following day and a nest with two eggs was found (Figure 2). The nest was a shallow depression in rocky soil and contained old dried forb stems. The adults called loudly from 75-100 m (246-328 ft) away as the nest was examined. An adult quickly returned to the nest after we left the nest site.

On 13 June, 23 days after the nest was discovered, four eggs were found during a second nest check. The shoreline at that time had receded and the nest site was no longer surrounded by water. Both parents were seen taking turns at the nest on 15 June, but at 1000 hrs on 16 June, only one egg was present. Since the reported incubation period for this species is 25-26 days (Harrison 1978), and because the parents were scolding loudly and feigning injury nearby, hatching was suspected. No attempt was made to find the hatchlings for fear of stepping on them.

On 19 June, two peep-sized Black-necked stilt young were observed approximately 75-100 m (246-328 ft) from the nest site. They were foraging along the shoreline of the pond. The parents were very protective and were seen chasing nearby Killdeers and Common Grackles. A third chick was seen on 20 June and the three young foraged between the parents that were spaced at approximately 50-75 m (164-246 ft) along the shoreline. The nest was empty on 27 June, but it is unclear if the fourth egg hatched or if it was depredated.

Between 11 July and 18 July, the female, which had brownish-black upperparts, disappeared from the nesting area and was not seen again. The three young were seen flying for the first time on 18 July. The family of four was last seen on 30 August at a small pond adjacent to Old Hwy 20. This site was approximately 2.5 km (1.6 miles) from the Marthaler sinkhole area which was dry by this time.



Figure 1. Black-necked Stilt nesting habitat at Marthaler Lane sinkhole pond, Colbert County, Alabama. The nest was located on Jeff Garner's left. (Photo by Tom Haggerty)



Figure 2. Black-necked Stilt nest with two eggs at Marthaler Lane sinkhole, Colbert County, Alabama. (Photo by Tom Haggerty)

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

TABLE 1. SIGHTINGS OF BLACK-NECKED STILTS IN THE TENNESSE VALLEY

Date	Location	Number of Individuals	Source
16 April 1975	Morgan Co., Wheeler NWR. Garth Slough	1	AB 29:864*
14 Nov 1975	Morgan Co., Wheeler NWR. Garth Slough	1	AB 30:84*
11 June 1980	Colbert Co., Leighton. Gnat Pond	2	Ned Piper pers. comm.
6-25 Sept 1991	Morgan Co., Decatur. Amoco Ponds	1	AB 46:104*
2 May 1998	Colbert Co., Leighton. Marthaler Lane	1	Ned Piper pers. comm.

* AB = American Birds

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