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MULTIPLE BLACK-NECKED STILT NESTING RECORDS IN THE RAINWATER BASIN

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Black-necked Stilts (*Himantopus mexicanus*) have increased throughout much of the mid-continent in recent decades (Will 1999, Brinkley 2003, Brinkley and Baicich 2004). Prior to 1970 there were fewer than ten Nebraska records (Sharpe et al. 2001). Reports have increased since 1970 and are now annual. Breeding was first recorded in Nebraska in 1985 at Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Helsingier 1985). Breeding has been more or less regular in the western Sandhills since then (Sharpe et al. 2001) and additional breeding records have occurred in Scotts Bluff (Silcock 2002b), Keith, and Hall Counties (Silcock 2000b).

In the Rainwater Basin, there was only one record prior to 1996, a specimen collected in Adams County 12 May 1956 (Sharpe et al. 2001). From 1996 through 2004, there were fourteen additional reports (see Table 1). This includes apparent successful breeding at Funk Waterfowl Production Area (WPA), Phelps Co., in 2003 (Silcock 2003).

The Rainwater Basin has been experiencing persistent drought since 2000. While drought has been a general theme, occasional localized heavy precipitation events have filled wetlands. Such was the case on 11-12 May 2005 when 3-8" inches of rain fell in portions of the Eastern Rainwater Basin, including Adams, Fillmore, and York Counties. Not long after, Black-necked Stilts were found at multiple wetlands, and several pairs attempted nesting. Below, we summarize observations of nesting Black-necked Stilts in the Eastern Rainwater Basin during 2005.

Harvard WPA, Clay County: Even though the authors visited the wetland on several occasions during May, stilts were not observed until 20 May when 6 birds were found (PD). Five birds were present 22 May (JGJ, WRS). Two nests were found 22 May in the south-central portion of the main wetland. Both nests were built-up mounds of vegetation approximately 10 meters from each other in 10-20 cm of water in an area with sparse aquatic vegetation (*Scirpus* spp.). One nest had no eggs and the other had one. The circumstances suggest that nesting had commenced only days after stilts first appeared at the wetland. At least one nest, containing 4 eggs, remained active through 19 June (PD, JGJ). Seven stilts were found 23 June, but the nest no longer contained eggs, and young were not observed (PD). Five stilts were present 27 June, but none were found 30 July or 20 Aug (PD).

Table 1. Rainwater Basin Black-necked Stilt Records, pre-2005.

Location	County	Date	Observation	Source
Unknown	Adams	12 May 1956	Specimen, HMM 28534	NBR 24:66, Sharpe et. al 2001
Funk WPA	Phelps	11 June 1996	1 bird	Silcock and Jorgensen 1996
North Lake Basin WMA	Seward	2-10 June 1997	1-2 birds	Jorgensen 2004
Funk WPA	Phelps	5-10 June 1997	1 bird	Silcock and Jorgensen 1997
Kissinger Basin WMA	Clay	20 May 1999	1 female	Jorgensen 2004
Mallard Haven WPA	Fillmore	10 May 2000	1 male	Jorgensen 2004
Hupp WMA	Thayer	13-15 May 2000	1 female	Jorgensen 2004
Funk WPA	Phelps	6 May 2000	1 bird	Silcock 2000a
Funk WPA	Phelps	11-18 June 2000	1-3 birds	Silcock 2000b
Johnson WPA	Phelps	1 May 2001	1 bird	Silcock 2001
Freeman Lake	York	8 May 2001	3 birds	Silcock 2001
North Hultine WPA	Clay	15 May 2001	1 bird	Silcock 2001
Funk WPA	Phelps	13-14 April 2000	1 bird	Silcock 2002a
Funk WPA	Phelps	9-15 April 2002	1 bird	fide JD
Fillmore Wetland #24	Fillmore	27 May 2002	1 female	Jorgensen 2004
Funk WPA	Phelps	1 June 2002	12 birds	fide JD
Funk WPA	Phelps	Summer 2003	nesting pair, 2 young	Silcock 2003
Harvard WPA	Clay	11 May 2004	2 birds	PD

Trumbull Basin, Adams County: A single bird was present 4 June (JGJ) and 8 were found 17 June (JGJ). On 24 June, a pair was tending to 3 newly-hatched chicks. A second pair was very agitated, suggesting the second pair was at some stage of breeding. Three adults were present 21 Aug, but no evidence of successful breeding (i.e., juveniles) was noted (PD).

Spikerush WMA, York County: Four birds were observed 15-19 June (JGJ, GW, EB). A nest found 18 June was near the east edge of the property and approximately 30 meters west of County Road R, the north-south road bisecting the wetland. The nest contained 4 eggs and was a built-up mound of vegetation in 30-40 cm of water. The nest was located in a stand of dead Giant Ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*) stalks that had grown the previous year. The wetland was recently renovated and 2005 was the first year it had filled with water since that work. The nesting attempt remained active through 6 July (JGJ, DS, LE, JS), but by 11 July the nest was found depredated (DS).

Non-breeders were recorded throughout the region in 2005; these sightings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Additional Black-necked Stilt Observations - 2005.

Location	County	Date	Observation	Source
Theesen Basin	Adams	13 May	Male and Female	JGJ
Wilkins WPA	Fillmore	14 May	Male	JGJ
Brauning WPA	Fillmore	19 May	Male	JGJ
York Wetland #128	York	24 May	Male and Female	JGJ
Sinninger Basin	York	5 Aug	4 birds	JGJ

The 2005 nesting records are the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th for the Rainwater Basin, the first for the Eastern Rainwater Basin, and the most easterly attempts recorded in Nebraska (Sharpe et al. 2001). It is not known whether any attempt fledged young. The number of birds (>25) recorded in 2005 is more than has been recorded in any previous year. This increase in the number of stilts in the Rainwater Basin during the past decade is consistent with the pattern of increase observed elsewhere in North America. It is likely that future nesting records will occur in the Rainwater Basin at wetlands possessing favorable habitat.

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