

Black-necked Stilt

Himantopus mexicanus



The black-necked stilt wades in shallow water to catch food. It is widely distributed along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States and is a common summer resident of the Gulf Coast region.

Coastal Wetlands

Black-necked Stilt

Himantopus mexicanus



APPEARANCE

Height: 13 to 17 inches (33 to 43 cm)

Wingspan: About 27 inches (68 cm)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Adult males have black backs, white bellies, black bills and long red or pinkish legs.
- Adult females look the same as males, but have brownish backs.
- Long, pointed black wings
- Slender bill curves slightly upward.

LIFE HISTORY

Range: Along Atlantic and Pacific coasts as well as the Gulf Coast. Sometimes in inland states such as Idaho, Kansas, or in the Rocky Mountains. Winters in Brazil, Peru, the West Indies, and southern parts of the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Summers on the Gulf Coast.

Diet: Worms, mollusks, shrimp, insects, small fish and sometimes floating seeds

Predators: Foxes, gulls, skunks, coyotes and other birds

Sexual maturity: At one year

Mating season: April through August

Nests: Built on the ground near water. Made of sticks, mud, or shells, or scrapes in the ground. May be lined with grass, twigs, and shells. Measure 6 to 10 inches (15 to 25 cm) in diameter.

Eggs: Three or four eggs that are tan-colored with dark brown or black irregular spots

Incubation: 22 to 26 days

Young: Chicks are able to run, walk and swim as soon as their down is dry, which is usually within 24 hours of hatching.

Life span: Approximately 20 years

HABITAT

Black-necked stilts prefer marshes, mudflats, flooded fields, ponds and drainage ditches where food is abundant.

BEHAVIOR

Black-necked stilts may arrange their nests in small colonies of six to ten nests. Although parents share nest-tending through the incubation period, males will often mob intruders and will even try to chase people away. After the chicks hatch, the parents will remove all eggshells from the nest, probably to better camouflage the nest. At night, chicks will hide from predators in the water, inhibiting predators from seeing them or *smelling* them.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Black-necked stilts are also called daddy longlegs, stilts and longshanks.
- Stilts' legs are longer in proportion to their bodies than any other bird except the flamingo.
- Stilts belong to the family Recurvirostridae which, in Latin, means "bent bill."
- Black-necked stilts have partially webbed feet, which allow them to swim—but they rarely do.

BLACK-NECKED STILTS AND PEOPLE

Because they will use man-made structures such as drainage ditches and sewage ponds for habitat, the range of black-necked stilts is expanding.