

Ornithological Observations



An electronic journal published by BirdLife South Africa and the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town



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Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen

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Recommended citation format:

Rueda E, Sherley RB 2013. First observation of Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* on Robben Island. Ornithological Observations, Vol 4: 24-26.

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=79>

Published online: 28 February 2013

- ISSN 2219-0341 -



FIRST OBSERVATIONS OF BLACK-WINGED STILT *HIMANTOPUS HIMANTOPUS* ON ROB BEN ISLAND

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Robben Island (S33°48', E18°22') in Table Bay, South Africa, is an Important Bird Area (Barnes 1998). The shortest distance to the mainland is 6.7 km, and it is c. 11 km from the port of Cape Town (Brooke and Prins 1986). The island has an area of 507 ha, and c. 12 km of shoreline, which is composed of rocky shores (Barnes 1998, Crawford and Dyer 2000) and stony beaches with, one small (400 m) sandy beach south of Murray's Bay Harbour (Tjørve and Underhill 2006). There are several quarries, filled with water, some only seasonally. The island provides breeding and foraging habitat for a number of marine and coastal species (Crawford and Dyer 2000). Sherley et al. (2011) reviewed the bird species which have been recorded on Robben Island since 2000, and the list of species totaled 165.

The species most recently added to the Robben Island birdlist was the Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (Sherley and Robinson 2012). This short note adds a closely related species to this birdlist, the Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*.

The Black-winged Stilt is a common breeding resident in southern Africa, typically found at extensive open, shallow waters, but it is also found at coastal lagoons, saltpans and other forms of evaporation ponds. The highest reporting rates are in the Western Cape, Free State and northeastern Botswana (Tree 1997). Underhill et al. (1999) estimated there to be 15 000-30 000 Black-winged Stilts resident in Southern Africa (south of the Zambezi and Cunene Rivers). One of



Fig 1 – Black-winged Stilt foraging in the stone quarry at the north end of Robben Island – 8 December 2012.

the closest wetland reserves to Robben Island, about 10 km away, is Rietvlei Nature Reserve (S34° 07', E18° 50') on the adjacent mainland. The maximum sighting of 407 birds at that locality in 1997 represents more than 4% of the southern African population, the maximum July count for the sub-region is 9,430 birds in July 2000 (Delany et al. 2009). Data from the Second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2, <http://sabap2.adu.org.za>) and the Birds In Reserves Project (BIRP, <http://birp.adu.org.za>) indicate that Black-winged Stilts are frequently encountered at the Rietvlei reserve. However, in spite of the presence of several Charadriiform species on the island, Black-winged Stilt has not previously been recorded on Robben Island (Sherley et al. 2011).

At 16:00 on 6 September 2012, RBS observed two Black-winged Stilts in the flooded stone quarry at the north end of the island. The birds were not present on the following day. On 4 October 2012, two



were seen by Bruce M Dyer, in the same place. On 3 and 4 December 2012, two birds were recorded by Arnold and Johan van der Westhuizen, also in the quarry (Fig 2). At 6:00 on 8 December 2012, ER recorded and photographed one adult Black-winged Stilt again in the flooded quarry at the north of Robben Island (Fig 1). It was foraging. The bird was watched for about five minutes and was left alone in order to avoid disturbance. The number of bird species recorded at Robben Island is now 167 (Sherley et al. 2011) taking into account the Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, first recorded in June 2012 (Sherley and Robinson 2012) and the African Spoonbill *Platalea alba*, first recorded on 4 December 2012 (Van der Westhuizen et al. in press).

Although stilts were not observed on every visit to the island after they were first recorded on 6 September, it seems more likely that there was one arrival of two stilts rather than two separate arrival incidents. During this two month period, little ornithological fieldwork was undertaken on the island (L.G. Underhill pers. comm.), so it is likely that the stilt(s) were present, but not recorded.

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Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the logistic support provided by Robben Island Museum. ER is supported by the University of Basque Country, and RBS by the Marine Research Institute, University of Cape Town, and the Leiden Conservation Trust. We thank BM Dyer, JH van der Westhuizen and AC van der Westhuizen for additional information.

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Fig 2 – Black-winged Stilt foraging in the Blue Stone Quarry on Robben Island – 3 December 2013 (Photo: AC vd Westhuizen)