

Mr. A. E. Knox, after stating that a specimen of the Black-winged Stilt was killed on the 17th of May, 1859, on the banks of a small pond near the junction of Midhurst and Bepton Commons, says:—"As opportunities for observing the habits and manners of these rare and accidental visitors so seldom occur, I make no apology for detailing some circumstances which appear to me to be especially worthy of notice, as tending to throw light on its remarkable and, to the ordinary observer, grotesque external conformation.

"The pond to which I have alluded is very shallow, the depth of the water, even at fifteen paces from the shore, scarcely exceeding a foot. About that distance from the banks, the surface was covered with numerous blossoms of the Water-Crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*). On examining these next day and frequently afterwards, I found them inhabited by numerous minute Dipterous and Coleopterous insects (small flies, midges, and beetles) comfortably nestled at the bottom of the flowers among the stamens, from which, indeed, none but the most delicate and attenuated instrument would be capable of extracting them without at the same time injuring the blossoms. Now, not one of our wading or swimming birds, except the Stilt, possesses a beak perfectly adapted for this purpose. But the Stilt has a bill almost as finely pointed as that of a Humming-bird; and those which make the nearest approach to it, as some among the smaller *Tringæ*, want the accompaniment of length of limb (that unusual development of *tibia* and *tarsus*) to enable them to wade to a sufficient distance from the shore.

"The bird was first noticed by an intelligent lad, the son of a small farmer of the name of Pearson, while driving the cows home to be milked in the evening. It was then standing nearly up to its belly in the water, and rapidly extracting the insects from the flowers, or, as the boy supposed, picking the petals themselves. It allowed him to approach within twenty yards before it took flight, when it extended its long red legs behind it, after the manner of a heron, and, alighting again on the opposite bank, immediately commenced wading out to the water-plants. Young Pearson then hastened home to his father, who lives at a short distance from the pond; and the latter, hurrying to the spot with a loaded gun, found the bird employed as before among the flowers of the Water-Crowfoot. But it was now exceedingly shy and wary, flying from one side of the pond to the other before Pearson could get within shot (but never uttering any cry or sound), so that he found it necessary to endeavour to "stalk" the bird. This a newly-made ditch and bank, one end of which approached within a few yards of the water's edge, enabled him to do successfully. On raising his head above the bank just before he fired, he perceived the Stilt within twenty yards of him, knee-deep in the water, in the midst of a cloud of gnats and midges, at which it was snapping right and left, much after the manner of a dog when teased by the flies in hot weather. The bird, fortunately but little injured by the shot, was brought to me the following morning, and, on dissection, proved to be a female. The ovarium contained several eggs, the largest of which was about the size of a pea. The stomach was crammed with beetles and gnats in a half-digested state, the *elytra* of the former showing that different species had been captured. I could not help being struck with the remarkable tenuity of the tips of the mandibles, as well as by the more obvious peculiarity from which the bird has derived its trivial name (the extraordinary length of its legs); but after listening to the simple story of George Pearson and his son, I perceived that the mystery was solved, and that here was a new instance of the wonderful adaptation of means to an end, of structure to habits, such interesting examples of which are continually presenting themselves to the observant naturalist."—*Ibis*, 1859, p. 395.

Mr. Salvin says:—"Over the whole of the lower end of the marsh of Zana and Chot Saboun the Stilt breeds in great abundance amongst the wet grass, choosing for the position of its nest a small tuft, so as just to keep the eggs out of the water.

"The bird uses its long legs with much greater ease than might be expected; and its long delicate strides, as it stalks about in search of food, are far from being ungraceful. The only time they seem to be in its way is at the moment of taking flight, when they hang awkwardly down till the bird, being fairly started, stretches them out far beyond the tail.

"The young Stilt is able to walk almost immediately on leaving the egg; one we found was capable of moving about while the other three were struggling to free themselves from the shell. The nest is composed of a few bits of dead reed or grass. The complement of eggs laid by one bird is four." (*Ibis*, 1859, p. 361.) They are of a buffy stone-colour, thickly blotched all over with purplish black.

My specimens of *Himantopus candidus* from North Africa, which have the back of the neck nearly white, indicate that the female has the back brown instead of rich greenish black as in the male. For the loan of the young bird represented on the opposite Plate, I am indebted to the kindness of A. W. Crichton, Esq.

The larger figures are those of the two sexes, of the size of life.