

Winter site-fidelity in the Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

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Yésou, P., Triplet, P., & Dubois P.J. 1995. Winter site-fidelity in the Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 76: 39.

Black-winged Stilts are thought to be nomadic or erratic when they winter in the Sahelian region, as a result of variable flooding of the local wetlands. The only between year control available for the area however refers to an individual ringed as a juvenile in France in 1991, then found in SW Mauritania in January 1993 and again at the very same spot in January 1995. This suggests that strict site-fidelity may be a commoner strategy than previously suspected for those individuals which overwinter in predictable habitat. In the light of this record, previous data from North Africa could also refer to site-fidelity by migrants, not necessarily to resident birds as previously thought.

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According to Cramp & Simmons (1983), Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* migrating to the Afrotropical region must undertake some movement within their wintering area as temporary pools form and dry out. Dubois (1992) further developed this idea in a study of the conditions prevailing on the wintering grounds in north and west Africa, particularly in the Sahelian region. Our own data from the lower valley of the Senegal river (both Senegalese and Mauritanian sides, north to Rosso upstream) similarly indicate huge year-to-year variation in numbers of Black-winged Stilt: 450 and 313 individuals were counted in January of the dry years 1993 and 1994 respectively (Trolliet *et al.* 1993; Triplet & Yésou 1993, 1994), while 1,137 were found in January 1995 after a record rainfall, the highest for the last 30 years, which flooded many temporary pools and lagunas (PT & PY unpubl.).

Two colour-ringed birds were observed in 1993, including one in a group of 36 individuals resting on the edge of a small permanent pool of c. 1 ha at a sand pit on the dune of Biret, or Toundou Bérèt, in SW Mauritania (c. 16°10'N, 16°26'W) on 22 January, which wore a pale green ring above a black one on the left leg, and an orange ring above a metal one (Paris FS 18471) on the right leg. This bird had been ringed as a flightless juvenile in June 1991 at Bouin (Vendée) on the Atlantic coast of France, during ringing co-ordinated by PJD and Philippe Delaporte. We visited the pool in a hurry in January 1994, being unable to carefully look at the Black-winged Stilts there. On 18 January 1995, this pool held a group of 54 Stilts, including the same colour-ringed individual.

This is the first case of a migrant Black-winged Stilt being controlled in two different winters in the Sahelian region (Dubois 1992). That it concerns a site-faithful bird is remarkable: it indicates that nomadism or erraticism are not the only wintering strategies for the species, and suggests that site-fidelity could even be the basic strategy for those birds which overwinter in wetlands with a quite predictable

water level. This proof of site-fidelity also sheds new light on two previous records of Black-winged Stilts from the lagunas of Sidi Moussa-Oualidia, Morocco, where birds ringed on 27 February 1971 and 4 March 1981 were found again on 8 December 1973 and 2 February 1987 respectively. These cases were originally interpreted as more probably referring to the resident breeding population (Dubois 1992), but now the possibility of site-faithful migrants must also be considered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the staff of Parc National du Diawling, Mauritania, for their kind assistance.

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