

Short Note | Nota Breve

## First breeding records of black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (Linnaeus, 1758) in the island of Maio

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Black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (Linnaeus, 1758) has a wide geographical distribution, including France and southern Iberia to sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar, and east to central Asia and northern central China, India, Sri Lanka, Indochina and Taiwan (Pierce 1996). On the African mainland, breeding sites nearest to the Cape Verde Islands are in Mauritania and Senegal (Isenmann *et al.* 2010, Borrow & Demey 2014).

Black-winged stilt breeds in a wide range of habitats, which may include freshwater areas or

saline environments, such as coastal lagoons with broad areas of mudflats, salt meadows (Johnsgard 1981), salt pans, coastal marshes and swamps (Cramp 1983, Pierce 1996). Usually, black-winged stilts breed in colonies typically of 2-50 pairs, and incubation is done by both sexes, lasting between 22 and 26 days (Pierce 1996). Nests are usually widely spaced on the ground, near water (Cuervo 2003), and are very diverse, ranging from a shallow scrape with little lining to quite substantial nests of available vegetation (Cramp 1983).



Fig. 1-2. Nests and eggs of black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Salinas do Porto Inglês, Maio, Cape Verde Islands, 5 June 2014 (© Fundação Maio Biodiversidade).



Fig. 3. Chicks of black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Salinas do Porto Inglês, Maio, Cape Verde Islands, 18 June 2014 (© Fundação Maio Biodiversidade).

The only regular breeding site of black-winged stilt in the Cape Verde Islands is at the Pedra de Lume salt pans in Sal Island (Hazevoet 1995), where it was first found breeding during the early 1960s (Naurois 1965, Naurois & Bonnaffoux 1969). During the mid 1960s, the population at Pedra de Lume was estimated at 30-40 pairs (Naurois & Bonnaffoux 1969), while counts during the years 1987-1990 yielded *ca.* 75 birds, including juveniles (Hazevoet 1995). During the past decade, 1-2 pairs occasionally bred at the Santa Maria salt pans, also in Sal Island (Hazevoet 2010, J. Cozens *in litt.*). Sightings of non-breeding black-winged stilts, presumably wanderers from the Sal population, have been recorded in the islands of Santiago, São Vicente, Boavista and Maio (Hazevoet 1995, 2010). Non-breeding birds had been collected in the Cape Verde Islands as early as 1924, these being the only reports from the archipelago before it was found breeding during the 1960s (Hazevoet 1995). Here we report the first breeding records of black-winged stilt for the island of Maio, giving details on clutch size and egg measurements.

On 21 May 2014, we observed a pair of black-winged stilts mating at Salinas do Porto Inglês, a saltpan area located in the southwest of

the island of Maio. A few weeks later, on 5 June 2014, we returned to the same area and found two black-winged stilt nests, placed on the ground and close to water. The clutch-size of the two nests was 3 (15°8'42"N, 23°13'18"W; Fig. 1) and 4 eggs (15°8'45"N, 23°13'20"W; Fig. 2), respectively. We measured the length and width of each egg with a sliding calliper. The 3-egg clutch had a mean egg length of 39.73 mm and a mean egg width of 28.03 mm. The mean egg length of the 4-egg clutch was 40.15 mm and the mean width 27.73 mm. We found a third black-winged stilt nest at Salinas do Porto Inglês (15°8'50"N, 23°13'27"W) one month later, on 5 July 2014, with a clutch composed of 4 eggs. These eggs had a mean length of 37.68 mm and a mean width of 25.88 mm. Although the clutch-size of the nests we found at Salinas do Porto Inglês are within the normal clutch size of the species (i.e. 3-5 eggs) (Cuervo 2003), the egg dimensions are below the average. Cramp (1983) and Pierce (1996) reported an average dimension of 44 mm in length and 31 mm in width for black-winged stilt's eggs. Adamou *et al.* (2009) linked an egg size decreasing tendency with a progressive drying of a wetland area, thus decreasing habitat quality and making the access of predators to clutches easier. However, we



cannot test this assumption without a habitat quality assessment and a bigger sample size.

A few days after finding the first two nests, we returned to Salinas do Porto Inglês, on 18 June 2014, and found two newborn black-winged stilt chicks (15°8'48"N, 23°13'22"W; Fig. 3). The chicks were close to the 3-egg clutch nest we had previously found and the adult birds were nearby. We collected blood samples for posterior analysis and measured their right tarsus (chick 1 = 28.0 mm; chick 2 = 25.8 mm), bill (chick 1 = 12.5 mm; chick 2 = 9.70 mm), and weight (chick

1 = 10.62 g; chick 2 = 12.36 g). Another chick was sighted (15°13'24"N, 23°12'58"W) on 15 June 2014, near to adult birds, in a small lagoon close to Calheta de Baixo, suggesting this is another breeding locality of black-winged stilt in the island of Maio. Our breeding dates agree with those from Pedra de Lume in Sal, where breeding has been reported from late February to July, with both eggs and downy young found throughout these months (Naurois & Bonnaffoux 1969, Naurois 1986, Hazevoet 1995).

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