

Black-necked Stilt

Accepted 6-1

This record was discussed by the Committee. Everyone wishes for definitive photographic evidence of all records, but that is not always convenient or possible. As such, the by-laws have given the Committee direction for evaluating sight only records. The Committee, overall, felt that, even without photographic evidence, the written description was sufficient to establish the identification of a species which has very unique physical characteristics among North American shorebirds. The Committee also took into consideration the appearance of many other uncommon shorebirds to the region undoubtedly due to weather patterns in the region at that time. Thus, this fine record of an elegant wader was accepted to the list.

Committee Member Comments:

CM1: Descriptions sound partially correct but with no photo evidence and the report of some of the birds having brown backs I will have to decline this report.

CM2: Despite the fact that there are no photographs, the well-written description clearly indicates a Black-necked Stilt, and rules out any other possible species. Furthermore, September 2018 brought many unusual shorebirds to West Virginia. I personally observed Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Baird's Sandpiper in Preston County, all rare birds in this part of the state. Since other rare shorebirds turned up in the state during the same month as this observation, it is certainly not beyond the realm of possibility that Black-necked Stilts made their way to our state as well.

CM3: From a personal standpoint, I feel it is difficult to support records that do not have physical evidence (photographs, recordings, etc.). The bylaws of the BRC make it clear however that this philosophy is not how votes should be cast. And in this case, for this species, there is sufficient reasoning to evaluate a sight-only record. The species is essentially unique amongst North American birds. Furthermore, there were 4 individuals present making a possible extreme vagrant species even more unlikely. The observers were all experienced with the species. The circumstances of the sighting are very believable in terms of finding wayward shorebirds. And the time frame saw a decided uptick of uncommon shorebirds visiting the state. All of those reasons trump my personal predilection for evidence-based evaluation, and I vote FOR this record.

CM4: Observer described a fairly unmistakable species of bird and eliminated any other potentially confusing species.

CM5: I vote to include the Wood County sighting of the Black-necked Stilt record for official state list. The Stilt was observed by three observers which is acceptable by our bylaws. The written evidence provides a description of the four Black-necked Stilts foraging. The report rules out the American Avocet which in my opinion is the only other possibility from the description. In my experience, the brown back reference is consistent with Black-necked Stilt identification. Coupled with the weather patterns at the time, this makes the BNST a possible visitor. Therefore, this report meets the standards set by the by-laws for inclusion on the Official State List.

CM6: Excellent written description with witnesses and red legs.

CM7: The observer provided an excellent description. Additionally, the bird was seen in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence when birds typically seen in the Southeastern US would have been blown into the Mid-Atlantic Region by the strong winds. The bird was seen by multiple people, but the others did not sign the form. Based on the description of the birds as Greater Yellowlegs size with long, reddish legs, black back with white spot above the eye and a long, thin bill, the two birds in question cannot be any other species in North America. The closest species to this description would be an American Avocet but they do not have black heads with white spots above the eye. The other two birds with brown backs also fit the description of female Black-necked Stilts. Thus, the description of what could only be a Black-necked Stilt combined with the timing of Hurricane Florence leads me to believe the observation and thus my vote for inclusion on the State List.