

*Black-necked stilt rare here***First sighting thrills birders**

On Wednesday, April 29 Fr. Charles Brandt made the first-ever sighting of a black-necked stilt in the Comox Valley and Campbell River areas.

The sighting was later verified by members of both the Mittenatch Field Naturalist Society and the Comox-Strathcona Natural History Society.

"Everybody's quite excited about it," Brandt says. "It could be the most northern sighting ever."

Brandt says he spotted two of the birds in the Courtenay sewerage lagoon as he was passing a few minutes before he was to give a talk.

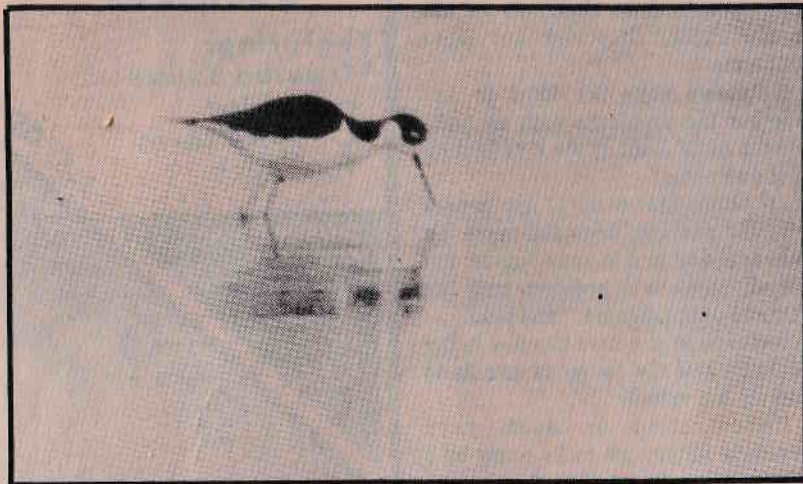
"I've seen them before in the States and knew they were quite rare here," he said.

On Friday he returned and took a picture of the pair, and since then others have spotted a total of six.

Brandt says that Doug Innis of the Mittenatch Society photographed the birds and also took recordings of them.

Brandt says he does not know why the birds are here.

"I don't know if they will stay or what will happen. They may turn around and go south."



BLACK-NECKED stilt

The black-necked stilt, known scientifically as the *himantopus mexicanus*, grows to a length of 14 inches or 36 cm. and the male's glossy black back and bill contrast sharply with white underparts.

The stilts have long red or pink legs and are the longest legs in proportion to their bodies of any bird except the flamingo.

Brandt says their normal territorial range is from south of the

Baja peninsula north to Oregon with occasional sightings in Washington state and B.C.

He says they may have been blown here in a storm, as that is often a source of rare bird sightings.

Brandt says they are shore birds and that many other shore birds are coming into this area now along the mud flats at Oyster Bay and in the estuary at the mouth of Black Creek.

Fr. Brandt studied ornithology at Cornell University and while there held the A.R. Brand scholarship in Bird Sound Recording and assisted in producing the bird sound recordings made by the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University.