

REALISTIC ACTING OF PIED STILTS.

Practical Jokes on Dogs.



New Zealand's pied stilt, which is really a species of long-legged plover, is fairly numerous in and about riverbeds, the shores of lakes and lagoons or on the marshy fringes of estuaries. Worthy mention of this protected wader is made by Edgar Stead in his "Life Histories of New Zealand Birds."

Despite the fact that stilts are of proportions that are somewhat unusual among birds (he writes), their movements at all times are exceedingly graceful. When walking slowly in shallow water, they raise each foot above the surface as they proceed, putting it down again very daintily, giving the effect of a consciously elegant, if not mincing, gait. During flight, which is strong and swift, the legs are trailed behind.

Stilts make a great fuss if anyone goes near their nest, made on the ground. They fly to a height, and then dash at the intruder, giving a harsh cry as they pass close overhead and turn upwards again. If intimidation fails, they try to divert attention to themselves by simulating injury, shamming broken legs or wings in a most realistic manner. I have often watched one flying along, when suddenly it would give a loud cry of pain, and flutter to the ground in a lop-sided manner as if one wing was broken. There it would flop along for a yard or so, and then lie down, flapping its wings and calling as if in agony. Perhaps it may stagger to its feet again, and then collapse with a drawn-out cry of anguish and a last flick of the wings and lie still. For a few moments it will remain motionless, but its general effect is marred by the fact that it holds up its head a little while it keeps a close watch on the intruder.

Dogs are, at first, completely deceived by stilts' antics, and chase the birds with every expectation of catching them; and when at last they realise that they are not going to do so, the chase has taken them well away from the nest.