

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*



Folk Name: Will-willet, Cumbee Billy, Fuss-box

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Very rare

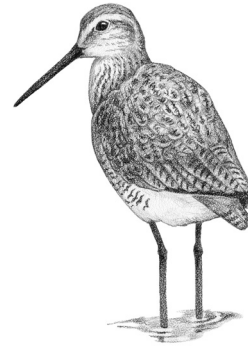
Habitat: Mudflats, lakes, ponds

The Willet is closely related to both the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, but unlike them it has gray legs. The Willet also has a conspicuous black-and-white pattern on its wings, which it shows both in flight and on the ground, as it sometimes flashes its wings while foraging. At 15 inches, it is an inch larger than the Greater Yellowlegs, and 4 ½ inches larger than the Lesser. Willets have a loud call that sounds like *pill-will-willet*. Willets are commonly found standing along the edge of the surf at Carolina beaches, usually in the company of a few Sanderlings. They are a very rare find inland in the Carolinas.

Ornithologists are currently discussing separating the western and eastern races of the Willet into distinct species. The western race breeds in the western United States and Canada and some of these birds migrate east to spend the winter along the Atlantic Coast. This is the race most expected in the Central Carolinas. The eastern race breeds along the East Coast and is believed to migrate south along the coast during the winter.

There are five reports of Willet in the region from the twentieth century. The first was sighted by Doug Pratt in Mecklenburg County on April 1, 1962. John and Vivian Whitlock found a Willet on a farm pond west of Albemarle while they were helping out with the Stanly County Spring Bird Count on May 17, 1977. They noted the black-and-white wing pattern, long bill, gray back, and the bird's call. Harriet Whitsett reported a second Willet in Mecklenburg County on May 9, 1984 at the McAlpine WWTP in Pineville. A group of nine was found by Allen Bryan on Moss Lake near Shelby, immediately after the passage of Hurricane Hugo, on September 22, 1989. David Wright discovered a Willet at the Charlotte Water Reservoir, on April 29, 1990.

There have been seven reports of Willet in the region since 2000. Taylor Piephoff reported two juvenile-plumaged Willets on a large exposed mudflat on the southern shore of Lake Norman off Norman Island Road



J F M A M J J A S O N D

on August 23, 2007. Carol Horton reported a Willet at Lake Norman State Park in Iredell County on September 1, 2007. John Scavetto reported one at McAlpine Park in Charlotte on April 18, 2010. Monroe Pannell found a Willet in Catawba County at Riverbend Park in August 2010. Steve Patterson found two on Lake Wateree in Kershaw County on July 4, 2013. Ken and Alan Kneidel found a Willet at the Iswa Nature Preserve on the Catawba River on August 20, 2015. The bird was later relocated several times and photographed. It was noted that a prolonged drought in the region had created an unusual variety of exposed mudflats and sand bars that attracted many shorebirds.

On August 14, 2016, Evan Wunder posted the following report:

Today, while kayaking on the Catawba River I had a flock of 11 Willets on a rock in the middle of the river. I did not have my compy [camera] with me to take photos. I was able to get close enough to see one take off on flight to see the distinctive under wing plumage to verify the id. The flock was just past the I-77 bridge down stream on the SC side.

The Willet is listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both “troubling” population declines and “high threats.” It is in need of conservation action.