

The shorebird pictured in the August issue should not pose a serious identification problem for the thoughtful observer. The *very long legs*, especially the tibia (the bone above the "knee"), and the *long, stout bill* immediately remove as possibilities all of the "peep" sandpipers and virtually everything smaller than the Pectoral Sandpiper. The *pale eye-ring and short, whitish supercilium (eye-stripe)* in front of the eye give the bird a spectacled appearance. This combination of features suggests that the bird is either a *Tringa* (yellowlegs or Solitary Sandpiper) or a Willet. The heavy body, combined with what appears to be a relatively short neck, argues against Lesser Yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpiper, both of which are delicate and streamlined species and which are finely spotted with white on the back.

Thus, the choice becomes one between Greater Yellowlegs and Willet. The absence of heavy, dark chevrons and bars on the sides and flanks, along with a lack of heavy stripes on the upper breast, serve to discount a Greater Yellowlegs in alternate (breeding) plumage. Likewise, a juvenile Greater Yellowlegs would display white dorsal spotting and a distinct breast-band of fine dusky stripes. Ultimately, however, it is the combination of the *straight, stout bill* and the unique *marbled pattern of the upperparts*, created by the *buff feather fringes and dusky submarginal lines on each feather*, that set the mystery bird apart as a Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*) in juvenal plumage.

For those who might question why the bird could not be a juvenile Red Knot, the leg length alone should be the key, along with the lack of a strongly scaled appearance on the back and wing coverts. The juvenile Willet in the picture was photographed in early August at Lubec, Maine.



Willet

Photo by Wayne R. Petersen

At a Glance . . .

Photo by Leslie A. Campbell
Courtesy of M.A.S.



Can you identify this bird? Identification will be discussed in next issue's *At a Glance*.



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