

## WILLET NESTING IN SPHAGNUM BOG IN EASTERN MAINE

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**Abstract.**—A small breeding colony of Willets (*Catoptrophorus s. semipalmatus*) was found in a sphagnum bog in eastern Maine. The habitat was very different from the normal salt marsh or dune habitat in which Willets usually breed. The first known nesting of Willets in Maine was in 1971. The present colony is 100 km NE of the closest Maine breeding site and further closes the gap between the Canadian Maritime Willet population and the Atlantic Coast population. Habitat is described and history of the species in Maine is briefly reviewed.

### **CATOPTROPHORUS S. SEMIPALMATUS ANIDANDO EN PANTANO DE SPHAGNUM EN MAINE**

**Sinopsis.**—Una pequeña colonia de individuos de *Catoptrophorus s. semipalmatus* fue encontrada anidando en un pantano de *Sphagnum* al este de Maine. El hábitat es muy diferente a los pantanos salobres o dunas en donde usualmente estas aves anidan. Se encontró a esta ave anidando en Maine por primera vez en 1971. La colonia descrita en este trabajo, se encuentra a 100 km. al NE de la colonia más cercana en Maine y parece cerrar la brecha entre la población Marítima Canadiense y la población de la costa del Atlántico. Describimos el hábitat utilizado por la especie y hacemos una reseña de la historia del ave en Maine.

The eastern subspecies of Willet (*Catoptrophorus s. semipalmatus*) breeds along the Atlantic Coast of North America from southern Maine to Florida with an isolated population north of Maine in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Along the Gulf Coast it ranges from Florida to Texas (A.O.U. 1983). The species typically nests in or along the edge of salt marshes vegetated with *Spartina alterniflora* and *S. patens*, in sand dune areas with *Ammophila breviligulata* (Howe 1982, Burger and Shisler 1978, Bent 1929), and in open fields or bushy pastures near salt marshes in Nova Scotia (Tufts 1986). We report the discovery of a small colony using a habitat notably different from that normally used by the species.

On 13 Jun. 1987, Wells found eight Willets in a sphagnum bog in Corea, Hancock Co., Maine (44°24'N, 67°59'W). One bird was flushed from a nest located under a 1 m black spruce (*Picea mariana*) on a raised hummock 200–300 m from forest edge. The nest contained four eggs. Other Willets dove repeatedly at Wells as he moved around the bog. The nest was set in sphagnum and was lined with small twigs, dried leaves (mostly *Vaccinium* sp.), and sphagnum. It measured 15 cm in diameter

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and 13.5 cm in depth. The site is located on a military base with limited access so we were not able to return until 14 Jul. 1987 and the Willets had left the site. Egg fragments were found in the nest and collected.

This 30–50 ha bog is characterized by an open hummocky sphagnum mat with abundant lichen (*Cladonia* ssp. and *Cladina* ssp.) and sedges. It is separated from tidal shoreline by >600 m of coniferous forest. Limited salt marsh habitat (<10 ha) occurs within 3 km of the Corea bog, but Willets do not breed there. Shrubs 20–30 cm in height occupied 70–80% ground cover on the raised hummock where the nest was located. Vegetation within 5 m of the nest included *Vaccinium angustifolium*, *Rhodora canadense*, *Larix laricina*, *Pyrus melanocarpa*, *Ledum groenlandicum*, *Nemopanthus mucronata*, *Picea mariana*, *Andromeda glaucophylla*, *Rubus chamaemorus*, *Solidago* sp., *Sarracenia purpurea*, *Calopogon pulchellus*, and *Eriophorum* sp. Other birds breeding within the same habitat included Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*), Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), and Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*).

Willets were not known to breed in Maine until 1971 (Finch 1971). The Maine Breeding Bird Atlas confirmed nesting on salt marshes north to Scarborough, Cumberland Co. (Adamus 1987). The discovery reported here is ≈100 km NE from this locality. In 1987, 6–7 pairs of Willets with newly fledged young were observed at Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge, Steuben, Washington Co., Maine, approximately 7 km ENE of Corea (Widrig 1988).

Shorebirds in the same tribe, *Tringini*, commonly use bogs and muskeg for breeding in the Nearctic and Palearctic (A.O.U. 1983, Cramp and Simmons 1983), but for *Catoptrophorus* this is a marked departure from normal nesting habitat preference. Sphagnum bogs are found regularly along the shores of eastern Maine and southern New Brunswick and may provide additional Willet nesting habitat.

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