

278-03-1997

WILLETS IN MERCER COUNTY

Ed Kwater

At 7.00pm on Sunday, August 10th, I decided to check the water levels in an area known as "the flats" at Shenango Reservoir, Mercer County, PA. Some muddy margins were evident and a small island of mud had formed about 100yards from shore. There were not many birds in evidence, except for a few Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*, and Least Sandpipers, *Calidris minutilla*. As I was preparing to leave a flock of ten large shorebirds flew past me at a range of about thirty yards and quickly disappeared from view behind some bushes on the bank. From their striking black and white wing patterns and otherwise gray-brown plumage I was certain that they were Willets, *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*. I stayed for several minutes but to no avail. Just when I had given up all hope of them reappearing I looked back at the mud island and immediately relocated the birds which were by now feeding very actively.

They were large, uniform gray-brown shorebirds with white underparts and a grayish breast. I could plainly see that they had very long, straight bills and long legs. The bills were almost twice the head length with a distinct blue-gray base and a black distal third. The legs were also blue-gray in color.

In flight I only saw the pattern of the upperwings as the birds were flying very low over the water. The primaries were jet black except for pronounced pure white bases. These formed a diagonal stripe across the wing, continuous with the largely white secondaries. All the primary wing coverts were also black. The secondary coverts were the same shade of pale gray-brown as the mantle and scapulars. The rump and uppertail coverts were white and the tail was gray.

The Willets had a similar feeding action to a godwit, *Limosa*, but with a faster, less deliberate probing action and more erratic movements that recalled a yellowlegs. I observed them for at least fifteen minutes using a Zeiss x10 binocular and a x30 Kowa spotting scope. The light was excellent throughout the observation period.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*)

Date of Sighting: 10 August 1997 to 10 August 1997

Location: SHENANGO RESERVOIR

County: MERCER

Observer(s): Ed Kwater

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Ed Kwater

Written Description: YES

Photo: NO

Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV | Class V | | | Abstain |
|---------------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|---|---|---------|
| | | | | | A | B | C | |
| F. Haas | | | X | | | | | |
| P. Schwalbe | | | X | | | | | |
| K. Parkes | | | X | | | | | |
| R. Ickes | | | X | | | | | |
| P. Hess | | | X | | | | | |
| J. McWilliams | | | X | | | | | |
| T. Floyd | | | X | | | | | |
| TOTALS | | | 7 | | | | | |
| DECISION | | | X | | | | | |

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

J C Haas

Date:

4-19-99