

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2015-06-25 22:31:40
Observer's Name	August Mirabella
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Phone	2153680594
Observer's Address	Street Address: 1443 Wheaton Lane City: North Wales State / Province: Pennsylvania Postal / Zip Code: 19454 Country: United States
Names of additional observers	August Mirabella
Species (Common Name)	Willet
Species (Scientific Name)	Tringa semipalmata
Subspecies (if known)	semipalmata
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Adult mostly alternate
Observation Date and Time	04-21-2015 9:00 AM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S22994043
County	Bucks
Location (City, Borough, Township)	New Britain Twp.
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Peace Valley Park
GPS coordinates of sighting	40.3261424,-75.1893997
Habitat	Lake edge
Distance to bird	1.5 miles down to 50 feet
Viewing conditions	Clear
Optical equipment used	Leica Scope

Description

I am submitting this since it apparently has not been documented in the state before and felt it should be added to the record whether accepted or not. From my experience with Western Willet limited to non-breeding birds, and having little real interest in studying the common summer Eastern Willlets, I can only say what I saw, as brief as it was. The first thing I looked at was the bill, which told me it was a Willet due to what I felt was a very thick long bill that only really narrowed slightly toward the end. It was a bulky thick bill as far as I am concerned and that is from memory, not from just looking at pictures. Having now studied both subspecies, I feel the bill is fine for Eastern and not as narrow, as long and tapering to a finer point as a Western. Next, I noticed the heavy dense underside streaking that extended into the belly before it changed to plain white. I feel this surpasses most Western if not all Western based on pictures I found on the internet. I also noticed a very heavy dark barring on the upper parts, and I remember distinctly noting some bright chestnut tones on some of the upper back feathers, which I assumed was normal for a bird changing into breeding plumage. I did not notice a pale gray overall tone rather than darker brown tone. Compared to Western, I felt the bird had shorter legs, shorter not elongated body, and a bill that was long but not as long in proportion to the head than expected in Eastern. Since the pictures are not great, I cannot say for sure that the colors in the pictures are good for bare parts. The bare parts show some paler legs and paler base to the bill, but not sure if this is glare or true colors, and I don't think the old brain thought to add to my mental notes if the pale colors were real. Of course when I saw it at a mile and a half and then close when it flew, the striking black and white wing pattern was obvious, but I didn't know what to look for in differences between the two subspecies.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

First flying from spot to spot on shore over a mile away. Then just loafing and walking on the edge of the lake until it flew.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

Photos are definitive.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

When the bird took off it flew directly east/northeast adding to my suspicion of Eastern.

Another consideration suggested to me was that the date is another factor working in favor of Eastern. The movement of Western Willet (rare in spring and particularly in eastern PA) is normally later than this date by almost a week based on recent spring records.

In addition, a check of the weather for the previous night and couple of days supports the potential movement of a migrant inland, then dropping due to the rain on 4/20-4/21, and then after the front during the night, a move back to the east in the morning. Certainly coming up the Delaware Bay and taking refuge at Peace Valley seems very reasonable under the weather conditions.

It looks like most of the day on April 19 had east winds:

<http://www.wunderground.com/history/airport/KPHL/2015/4/19/DailyHistory.html>

As did April 20 with rain:

<http://www.wunderground.com/history/airport/KPHL/2015/4/20/DailyHistory.html>

On April 21 it rained overnight, and I believe a short time after sunrise, and the wind shifted dramatically to NW with the passage of a front:

<http://www.wunderground.com/history/airport/KPHL/2015/4/21/DailyHistory.html>

I had asked for comments and received many without details. I have permission from Kevin Karlson to share his comments as follows:

"It is definitely an Eastern Willet for the following reasons: the stocky bill with very little tapering to the tip shows a flesh-colored base in one of your photos, which is definitive for Eastern Willet. Western never shows this color on the bill. The yellowish legs are also consistent with breeding Eastern, with Westerns having black legs. Also, the very dense, dark barring on the chest is indicative of Eastern, with Western Willets typically

showing more space between the barring, although some Westerns in high breeding plumage might approach this pattern. The short legs and foreshortened body structure is better for all Eastern Willets of both sexes, while only small male Westerns can show a somewhat similar body shape, but usually with a more tapered rear body. Eastern Willet is not an expected migrant inland, since virtually all of Joe Smith's transponder birds from Brazil migrated straight to S. Florida nonstop and then straight to Delaware Bay without stopping. The bad weather probably pushed this bird off course. It is not expected inland at all, but this is definitely an Eastern Willet.
Good stuff. Kevin"

FOLLOW UP BY KEVIN

"August, feel free to use my comments in your report, and as for the bill not being right for Eastern, that is ridiculous. The bill is on the long end of the spectrum for Eastern, but just fine in length and proportions for a female Eastern. Some male Westerns have bills that are very similar to female Easterns, but Western does not show the obvious pink base that the third photo in the collage shows, and the proportions of the bill are better assessed in that photo. The bird lacks the long neck and proportionally small head of Western Willet, and its body shape is stocky and foreshortened, not long and elliptical as in Western (most Western have bodies that resemble Marbled Godwits, while Eastern's body shape is more stocky and compact). I study both species side by side in Texas every April for the past 13 years to pinpoint differences in body shape and structural features as well as plumage, and this bird fits into the Eastern camp very neatly. Most birders don't know the fine points of body shape and structural differences between the willets since they never have to critically assess them for ID purposes.
Kevin"

I also received details from one of the most highly skilled nationally known top birders in the nation. He did not respond to my request to quote him, so I will not use his name but will include his comments:

"The very thick and relatively short bill and relatively short tarsi weight strongly for me to Eastern. It is also heavily marked enough for Eastern, but probably in an overlap between heavily-marked Western and lightly marked Eastern. I will say, that this is pretty difficult, perhaps mostly because I expect it to be a Western (cuz it's inland!), and it doesn't match up. I am slightly biased by thinking that April is the time, if any, to get Eastern Willet in PA. I also think that when Western Willets do appear in the east in spring (very rare), they tend to be later."

The following link shows some May Western Willets that I think show well the long slender tapering bill vs. the bulky bill of Eastern among other features. There are two Eastern pictures as well.

<http://brucemactavish1.blogspot.ca/2014/11/eastern-western-willets-sos.html>

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

After the above quoted comments and several other less detailed votes for Eastern by US or world class skilled experts, I feel fairly confident that my gut feel was correct. My lack of experience with alternate Western and some other skilled birder comments voting for Western add some concern.

During

None

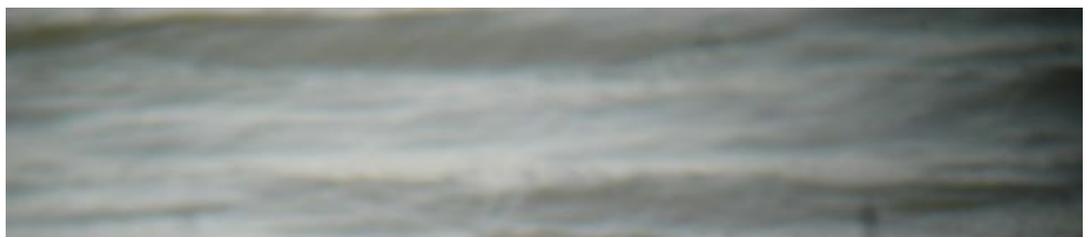
After

Sibley Guide/O'Brien, Karlson, Crossley Shorebird Guide/Internet

Supporting evidence (check all that apply)

Photograph

Upload images, audio, video or drawings





[Peace Valley Pk. 4-21-15 \(2\).jpg](#)



[Peace Valley Pk. 4-21-15 \(3\).jpg](#)





[Peace Valley Pk. 4-21-15 \(4\).jpg](#)



[Peace Valley Pk. 4-21-15.jpg](#)

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