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## Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*

Most of the sandpipers that winter in Florida leave the state to breed elsewhere, but the Willet is a conspicuous exception. Although 2 subspecies occur in winter, only *C. s. semipalmatus*, the Eastern Willet, breeds in the state. In suitable habitat, the Willet breeds from the Pacific Northwest and Canada south to California; east through Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Nebraska and South Dakota; and from New Brunswick south to islands off Venezuela.

**Habitat.** According to Stevenson and Anderson (1994), breeding Willets inhabit "shortgrass salt marshes and beaches where dunes rise above the high-tide line and are covered with clumps of beach grass (*Panicum amarum*) and sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*)." The Willet sometimes nests on open beaches but, most often, the nest is carefully hidden in marsh grasses.

The diet of the Willet is composed of invertebrates and, rarely, fish. Fiddler crabs are the most common food item. Other crabs, mollusks, crayfish, and insects make up the remainder of its diet (Howell 1932).

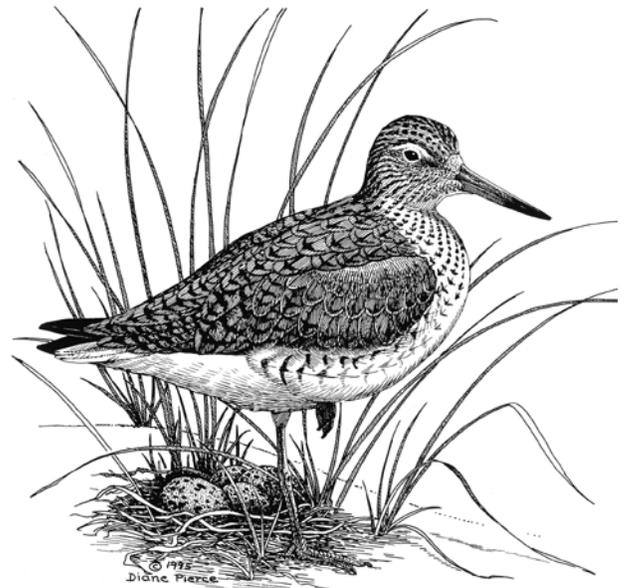


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The Willet is a semicolonial breeder, in the sense that several pairs often nest closely together. The birds lay 3-5 eggs (Howell 1932, Cruickshank 1980), spotted with brown, varying from olive to sky-blue. Incubation takes 22 to 29 days, but the age at which young first fly is unknown (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

**Seasonal Occurrence.** Eggs have been collected 14 April through 10 June. Migration takes place July through October and in the spring, March through May.

**Status.** Willets nest along the entire Florida coastline, and it is highly likely that they breed in almost every location where they are mapped.

Codes "A" (agitated behavior) and "DD" (distraction display) were frequently used for this species, because nesting adults are highly vocal and, therefore, conspicuous. When a human draws near to the nesting territory, the birds perch on a bush or other elevated perch to loudly scold (and oftentimes attack) the intruder. These habits make the adults easy to locate, although the nests are hard to find. Adults sit quietly during incubation, unless the observer comes very near, the nest will be missed. Finding recently fledged young was another easy means of confirming breeding.

Since adult Willets are so conspicuous in the breeding season, the chances that they were missed by atlasers are small. For this reason, the Atlas map probably reflects an accurate picture of the breeding distribution of the Willet in Florida.

Robert W. Loftin

# Willet

