

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Willet assaults Least Sandpiper: On 7 July 1987 at 11:45 A.M. the authors were counting and observing shorebirds in the South Marsh at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens, New York. Berland was observing a Willet on its usual perch: an abandoned boat. This bird was one of a pair which had been seen defending three young on territory for more than a week. Farther along the path Morris was searching for a Least Sandpiper which had alighted, fed briefly, then disappeared among clumps of marsh grass. Berland saw the Willet leave its perch, calling. As Berland proceeded towards Morris he saw the Willet on the ground, its head bobbing rapidly. Upon further observation he noticed that the Willet was holding a sandpiper "peep" by the nape in its bill while pounding it against the ground. The "peep" tried to escape but was overtaken within a few feet by the Willet. The Willet grasped the "peep" again as Berland alerted Morris to the attack. The Willet pommelled the "peep" several more times. Both authors saw the Willet holding the "peep" like a rag doll. One wing hung limply and the "peep" appeared dead. The Willet then slammed the "peep" to the ground one last time before releasing it. After plucking some feathers from the "peep's" upperparts, the Willet returned to its perch, while the "peep" lay motionless. Through our spotting scopes, at a distance of less than fifty yards, we identified the "peep" as a Least Sandpiper. After a few minutes, the "peep", which had been dazed, struggled across the shore and disappeared into the marsh, its fate unknown. A juvenile Willet, still showing down on the head, was seen near the boat moments after the attack. In the next twenty minutes the adult Willet was seen chasing a Common Tern and a crow from its territory.

We would appreciate hearing from any observers who have witnessed other examples of extremely aggressive behavior by Willets.

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