

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

WILLETS ON WIRES

The persistent, localized employment of telephone and electric wires as lookouts by Willets (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*) on Dune Road in the western portion of Shinnecock Bay, Suffolk, is a possible example of culturally learned behavior in a semi-colonial species. The use of bushes, stumps, poles and structures for observation posts is well-known and widespread in this species but landing on a wire requires a fair amount of skill for a large shorebird. Nevertheless the habit is now well-established, from the beginning of breeding season into midsummer, on wires adjacent to the rather densely occupied marshes in the southwestern part of Shinnecock Bay. It is easily observed on the stretch of Dune Road between Tiana Beach and the village of Quogue where, at any given time of day, a half-dozen or more birds may be seen on wires.

This behavior does not appear to be connected with courtship display but rather with territorial defense. One or more members of what is essentially a series of dispersed colonies simultaneously occupy suitable vantage points on poles and wires along Dune Road and its several pull-outs. Loud alarm calls from these sentinels bring numbers of calling birds up from local and even adjacent marshes to mob intruders. The use of wires for this purpose, characteristic of a particular population, may be learned behavior which has been passed on locally for more than a quarter century.

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INVITING NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Readers are invited to submit short pieces of interesting sightings, observations or incidents, etc., that do not require full-blown article treatment. No bibliography is necessary unless the author wishes to submit one. If a photograph is included, we require either a black-and-white glossy print or a color negative which we will convert to a b&w print. If the editor believes the note should be expanded to a full article, you will be invited to do so.

