



*Golden Plover drawing by Brian K. Willis.*

## Shorebirds at O'Hare Post Office Ponds

by Richard Biss

In 1994, I observed three additional shorebird species, American Woodcock (25 April, 1 individual), Willet (25 April, 1 individual), and Western Sandpiper (7, 11, and 14 Sept., 1 individual each day) bringing the total to 24 (see table).

I saw a total of 83 species there in 1993 and 1994. Species that successfully nested in 1993 include Canada Goose (10 young), Mallard (50 young), Killdeer (8 young), Spotted Sandpiper (6 young), Barn Swallow, and Horned Lark (4 young and 4 adults in July).

The area collects runoff water from O'Hare Airport, so water levels can fluctuate tremendously from day to day. On many occasions, the ponds were almost completely dried

out on one day, and totally flooded the next day. One inch of rain easily produces a foot of water in this area. I don't know what the City of Chicago plans to do with these ponds. I saw surveyors there much of 1992. Hopefully this area will not be destroyed in the near future, considering how few shorebird locations there are in Chicagoland.

Birders can park next to the post office or along O'Hare Cargo Road (see accompanying map). The ponds may also be viewed from Irving Park Road, but the rapidly moving traffic makes observations difficult.

With the ongoing loss of so much shorebird habitat, I never considered it possible to find an area like this just eight minutes from my doorstep. It just shows how one can be blessed for doing an errand of mercy.

While mailing an urgent letter for my wife, Mary, on 17 May 1993 at the 24-hour O'Hare Post Office, I discovered a new shorebird location which I have called the O'Hare Post Office Ponds for obvious reasons. I heard a Semipalmated Plover and saw all the habitat there, but unfortunately it was midnight and I didn't have my binoculars, so I was unable to bird there until the next morning.

When I returned, I saw 114 shorebirds of nine species including one Wilson's Phalarope, 50 Least Sandpipers, 20 Semipalmated Plovers, and 15 Dunlins. An unusual interior record of the Sanderling was observed there at 6:30 a.m. on 28 May 1993. The species is a common spring and fall migrant along Lake Michigan and an occasional migrant elsewhere in the state (Bohlen 1989).

High counts for 1993 included 14 shorebird species on 12 Sept. and 170 shorebird individuals on 10 July. From May through October 1993, I saw 21 species of shorebirds at the O'Hare ponds.

