

FIRST RECORD OF WILSONS PHALAROPE, *PHALAROPUS TRICOLOR*, FOR TOBAGO

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On 28 September 1990, Charles and Betty Crabtree, Andrew Cunningham, Faye Barnes, Mary Hurd, and the authors discovered a Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) at Buccoo Marsh, Tobago, West Indies (60°42'W, 11°23'N). The phalarope was feeding in cattle-grazed, partly submerged grass along the margin of a brackish pond bordered by red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*). The phalarope associated with Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*), Solitary Sandpipers (*T. solitaria*), and Spotted Sandpipers (*Actitis macularis*). We studied the bird at length and later that evening relocated and photographed it. Because no strong frontal systems or hurricanes were present during the weeks preceding this sighting, we assume that this bird was simply a vagrant. The sighting constitutes the first record of Wilson's Phalarope for Tobago and one of the few but increasing number of records for the Caribbean region.

The phalarope was in typical plumage, pale gray above and pure white below, with a faint facial mask and dull yellow legs that were shorter than those of the Lesser Yellowlegs. Its needle-like bill was clearly longer than its head. As it fed with the other shorebirds, it was conspicuous because of its slimness, extreme paleness, and quick movements. When flushed it uttered a single low "chock" note. In flight it showed uniformly dark wings, a white rump, and a whitish tail. Its feeding behavior was distinctive — it crouched low and swung its bill from side to side like an American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*).

Similar species.—Of the three species of phalaropes (Red Phalarope *P. fulicarius*, Red-necked Phalarope *P. lobatus*, and *P. tricolor*), Wilson's is unique in having an exceptionally long, narrow, black bill and longish legs and in lacking, in basic plumage, a strong white wing stripe, a dark-centered rump, and a striking black mask (Johnsgard 1981, Harrison 1983). Lesser Yellowlegs could possibly be confused with Wilson's Phalarope, but the former has finely spotted upperparts and either dark streaks or a grayish wash on the throat and upper breast. Another species of shorebird that could possibly be confused with Wilson's Phalarope is the Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*), which is overall a much grayer bird in basic plumage than Wilson's Phalarope and which has a noticeably longer, heavier bill that droops near the tip.

Range.—Unlike the wide-ranging Red- and Red-necked Phalaropes, Wilson's Phalarope is almost totally restricted to the Americas. It breeds on prairie potholes and sloughs from southern Yukon south to central California eastward to Manitoba, Minnesota, and Kansas, less commonly around the southern and eastern Great Lakes, and locally in New Mexico and Massachusetts. It winters in southern South America, with a few individuals found sporadically throughout the winter in

California and Texas. Wilson's Phalarope is a common migrant in the western portion of the United States but is much less common east of the Mississippi River (Farrand 1983).

Fall migration is direct, from the western and central United States to the west coast of South America. Stiles and Skutch (1989) considered it a common to abundant migrant in western Costa Rica but reported that the species was unrecorded on the Caribbean slope. Harrison (1983) reported that most Wilson's Phalaropes move south in autumn along the Pacific coast, reaching Ecuador and Peru as early as late July, with some individuals still in alternate plumage. From southwestern Peru their migration seems to be across the Andes, with large concentrations seen moving south at 2,400-4,770 m elevation in August and September, with hundreds seen during August on Lake Titicaca (Harrison 1983).

The majority of Wilson's Phalaropes winter from Peru and Uruguay south through Argentina and Chile, ranging south to Tierra del Fuego, the Falkland Islands, and even to the Antarctic Peninsula (Conroy 1971). Extralimital records are from Hawaii, the Galapagos Islands, Brazil, and western Europe (American Ornithologists' Union 1983).

Caribbean records

Sightings of Wilson's Phalarope in the Antilles are scarce but increasing. Hitherto the species has been recorded from Old Providence; Grand Cayman and Little Cayman, where it is a rare transient (Bradley 1985); Jamaica in early April (Voous 1983); Hispaniola; Puerto Rico, where it is a rare visitor from August to March, with four records (Raffaele 1989); St. Croix, where one bird was observed 10 and 19 October 1981 at Estate Shays with Lesser Yellowlegs and Stilt Sandpipers (Sladen 1988), one bird observed on 6 October 1987 (Norton 1987), and where Raffaele (1989) reported "regular records during the 1980s"; Guadeloupe; Martinique; and Barbados, where gunners regularly report the species (*vide* M. B. Hutt). Bond (1985) gave the range of dates of occurrence in the Caribbean as 8 September-10 October and 1 April-11 May.

Bond's reference to the species in the Caribbean is noteworthy. In his early publications (Bond 1936, 1947), he listed no records for the Caribbean. In 1956, he added Wilson's Phalarope to his list of accidentals (Bond 1956), with records from Guadeloupe (recorded by L'Herminier in the early 1880s) and Martinique (specimen collected 25 September, year not given, by Reverend Père R. Pinchon). In later revisions, editions, and supplements, Bond added records from Barbados on 18 September (Bond 1960), Little Exuma and Jamaica (Bond 1971), and Grand Cayman, Old Providence, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico (Bond 1985). His record from Little Exuma is of particular interest in that it probably refers to an individual seen there on 3 April by Brudenell-Bruce (1975), who described it as "either Northern Phalarope or Wilson's Phalarope." It appears that Bond eventually rejected the sighting, dropping Little Exuma from his list of locations in his later publications.

Wilson's Phalarope is rare in the southern Caribbean, with a total of five records from Bonaire, Venezuela, and Surinam. Voous (1983) reported 3 sightings from Bonaire during the

1970s: a single bird at Great Salt Lake 25-27 January 1970, another individual there in January 1971, and a flock of about 10 at Goto on 8 March 1979. On the South American mainland one bird was observed at Chichiriviche, Falcón, Venezuela, 5-7 November 1977 (Altman and Parrish 1978), and one individual was seen in Surinam about 50 km east northeast of Paramaribo, 23 September 1980.

Although Wilson's Phalarope historically has been considered accidental in the Caribbean, the increasing number of observations there during the 1980s would seem to indicate a change in their migration route. Morrison and Manning (1976) reported that Wilson's Phalarope has rapidly expanded its breeding range northeastward in Canada, and Patterson (1980) suggested that, beside their traditional migration route along the Atlantic coast, the species may have established a new inland migration route through the Appalachian Mountains. If the trend continues, Wilson's Phalarope eventually may be recorded throughout the Lesser Antilles and northeastern South America. The present record from Tobago thus may begin to fill the gap between northeastern South America and the Lesser Antilles.

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