

First record of Wilson's Phalarope, *Phalaropus tricolor*, for Tobago

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On September 28, 1990, a group of birders from the U.S. (Charles and Betty Crabtree, Andrew Cunningham, Faye Barnes, and Mary Hurd) and the authors discovered a Wilson's Phalarope, *Phalaropus tricolor*, at Buccoo Marsh, Tobago, West Indies. The phalarope was feeding in grazed, partly submerged grass along the margins of a saline pond bordered by mangroves. It was in the company of Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*), Solitary Sandpiper (*T. solitaria*), and Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*). We studied the bird at length and later that evening relocated and photographed it. The sighting constitutes the first record of Wilson's Phalarope for Tobago and one of the few records for the entire Caribbean Basin.

The phalarope was in typical basic plumage. As it fed with the other shorebirds, it was conspicuous because of its slimness, extreme paleness, and its fast movements. It was pale grey above and pure white below, with a faint facial mask and dull yellow legs that were shorter than those of the Lesser Yellowlegs. Its needlelike bill was clearly longer than its head. When flushed it uttered a single low "chock" note. In flight it showed dark wings, a white rump, and a whitish tail. Its feeding behaviour was distinctive – it crouched low and swung its bill from side to side like an American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*). Inasmuch as no strong frontal systems or hurricanes were present during the weeks preceding this sighting, we assume that this bird was simply a vagrant.

Similar species: Of the three species of phalaropes in the world, the Wilson's is the only one with an exceptionally long bill and longish legs and which, in basic plumage, lacks a strong white wing stripe, a dark-centered rump, and a striking black mask. The Lesser Yellowlegs is almost the same size as the Wilson's Phalarope, but the Lesser Yellowlegs has finely spotted upperparts and either dark streaks or a grayish wash on the throat and upper breast. The Stilt Sandpiper has a noticeably longer, heavier bill that droops near the tip and is overall a much grayer bird in basic plumage than the Wilson's Phalarope.

Range: Unlike the wide-ranging Red (*P. fulicarius*) and Red-necked (*P. lobatus*) Phalaropes, the Wilson's is almost totally restricted to the Americas. It breeds on prairie pot-holes and sloughs from southern Yukon south to central California and across to Manitoba, Minnesota, and Kansas, less commonly around the

southern and eastern Great Lakes, and very 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. In migration, Wilson's Phalarope is common in the western portion of the U.S. but is much less common east of the Mississippi River.

Fall migration is direct, from the western and central U.S. 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 side. 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. He stated that from southwestern Peru their migration seems to be across the Andes, with large concentrations seen moving south at 2,400-4,770 m in August and September; hundreds were seen during August on Lake Titicaca.

The vast 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 the Antarctic Peninsula. Extralimital records are from Hawaii, the Galapagos Islands, Brazil, and western Europe.

Records of Wilson's Phalarope in the Caribbean Basin are scarce. It hitherto has been recorded at least once from the following islands: Old Providence, Grand Cayman, Little Cayman, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, St. Croix, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Barbados. In 1956, Bond knew of records only from Guadeloupe (recorded by L'Herminier in the early 1800s) and Martinique (specimen, collected on Sept. 25 by Reverend Pere R. Pinchon, Seminaire-College, Fort-de-France, Martinique). In later publications and revisions he added records from Barbados (Sept. 18) (Bond 1961) and Little Exuma and Jamaica (Bond 1971). His last revision (1985) gave the range of dates as Sept. 8-Oct. 10 and Apr. 1-May 11.

If Bond's record from Little Exuma is identical to that of Brudenell-Bruce (1975), it is unacceptable, since it was Brudenell-Bruce himself who saw the bird (on April 3); he was able to identify it only as "either Northern Phalarope or Wilson's Phalarope".

Regarding the distribution of the Wilson's Phalarope elsewhere in the Caribbean, Bradley (1985) reported Wilson's Phalarope in the Cayman Islands as "... a rare transient, recorded in Grand Cayman and Little Cayman." Raffaele (1989) described the species as "A very rare visitor to the region between August and March, being seen with increasing frequency. There are four records from Puerto Rico and regular records from St. Croix during the 1980s".

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