

FIRST RECORDS OF WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*PHALAROPUS TRICOLOR*) FOR TRINIDAD

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Abstract.—We report the first records of Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*), a rare Nearctic migrant in the Caribbean, for Trinidad. One individual was observed in the rice fields of Caroni, Trinidad, from 28 August to 12 September 1998. Two individuals were observed and one photographed in the rice fields of Caroni, Trinidad, on 1 October 2000.

Key words: distribution, migration, *Phalaropus tricolor*, Scolopacidae, Trinidad, Wilson's Phalarope

Resumen.—PRIMEROS REGISTROS DEL FALAROPO DE WILSON (*PHALAROPUS TRICOLOR*) PARA TRINIDAD. Se relatan los primeros registros del Falaropo de Wilson (*Phalaropus tricolor*), un migrante neártico raro en el Caribe, para Trinidad. Observamos un individuo en los arrozales de Caroni, Trinidad, del 28 de agosto al 12 de septiembre de 1998. Observamos dos individuos y fotografiamos a uno en los arrozales de Caroni, Trinidad, el primero de octubre de 2000.

Palabras clave: distribución, Falaropo de Wilson, migración, *Phalaropus tricolor*, Scolopacidae, Trinidad

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) breeds in North America and winters primarily in South America, with most of the population migrating through Central America (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Colwell and Jehl 1994). A few individuals migrate across the Caribbean, where the species occurs as a rare migrant on many islands, especially during autumn (Colwell and Jehl 1994, Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Here we report the first two records for Trinidad.

OBSERVATIONS

At 09:30 h on 28 August 1998, Gomes and Hayes found a basic-plumaged bird actively feeding with a small flock of other shorebird species in a shallow flooded rice field at Caroni, Trinidad. The bird was studied carefully through a 25x telescope until 09:55 h and seen again from 10:37 to 10:38 h. In his field notes, Hayes described it as having a "long, thin black bill; yellow legs, white underparts; light gray crown, hindneck, back and scapulars, darker gray flight feathers; whitish forehead and superciliary; dark gray postocular streak, continuing as a light-gray streak down the sides of the neck; ...tail white when flying." The bird foraged by "leaning forward with outstretched neck ducked repeatedly underwater, with bill sweeping sideways fairly rapidly, just below the surface...; legs rapidly propelling it forward in shallow water." On 31 August and 1 September 1998 it was relocated by G. White, who described "brown flight feathers contrasting with the smooth gray back." Subsequent efforts to relocate it were unsuccessful until 12 September

1998, when it was observed for the last time from 17:05 to 17:10 h by Hayes.

At about 12:00 h on 1 October 2000, Kenefick found two birds actively swimming and feeding in a flooded rice field with tall, dense vegetation at Caroni, Trinidad. The birds were carefully studied through a 32x telescope until 14:00 h. In his field notes, Kenefick described the birds as having "entire underparts clean white on one bird; the other had a faint trace of peachy/buff just above the 'water line'; needle thin wholly black bill; forehead and face white; crown, nape, mantle and wing coverts the softest pearl grey; beady black eye; grey line from nape extends across the ear coverts to reach the eye [forming] an impression of a white supercilium...; lores white; flight feathers dark grey/black in folded wing; when stretching, underwing coverts white and under flight feathers pale grey." The birds swam constantly and frequently picked insects out of the air, from the grass stems, or from the surface of the water. At 13:05 h, Hayes arrived and eventually obtained several photographs of one bird (Fig. 1). When one bird was flushed, Hayes noted its white tail.

DISCUSSION

These birds were distinguished from the Red Phalarope (*P. fulicaria*) by the relatively long, thin, needle-like bill and paler, less contrasting head markings (Hayman *et al.* 1986). They were distinguished from the Red-necked Phalarope (*P. lobatus*) by the paler, less contrasting head markings and



Fig. 1. Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) at Caroni, Trinidad, 1 October 2000. Note the relatively long, thin bill, pale head markings, and plain gray upperparts which distinguish this species from other phalaropes. Photo by Floyd Hayes.

plain gray back lacking dark streaking (*Ibid.*).

Because the brown feathers of juvenile Wilson's Phalaropes are quickly replaced by adult-type feathers as early as August (*Ibid.*), we cannot be certain of the age of these birds. However, the presence of "brown flight feathers" described by G. White on the bird observed in 1998 and the "faint trace of peachy/buff" described by Kenefick on the flanks of at least one bird in 2000 suggests that these individuals may have been immatures.

Although a previous sight record of Wilson's Phalarope exists from Buccoo, Tobago, on 28 September 1990 (Murphy *et al.* 1991), our observations provide the first records for Trinidad. Both observations have been accepted by the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee. Since mid-1998, we have routinely scrutinized flocks of shorebirds in the Caroni rice fields, usually a few days each week, during peak shorebird migration (May, July–October). Given the lack of further records of this species, we suspect it to be a very rare autumn migrant that does not occur annually in Trinidad.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

G. White kindly provided details on his observations. We appreciated the companionship of those

who shared our observations, including B. Hayes (1 October 2000), I. Samad (28 August 1998), D.-A. Wilson, and G. Wilson (12 September 1998).

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