

In 1982 a photograph of swimming phalaropes taken from a boat on Stellwagen Bank caused considerable controversy over the identification of the shorebirds in the picture. In response to the controversy, *Bird Observer* published a brief note on the identification of Red-necked and Red phalaropes at sea. That seminal article was the introduction to the regular "At A Glance" column in *Bird Observer*.

August's photograph returns to the problem of identifying a phalarope; this time, however, the phalarope is not a swimming bird. Phalaropes in nonbreeding plumage are easily distinguished from all other shorebirds by their distinctive dark eye patches. This feature is especially prominent in Red-necked and Red phalaropes. The extensive eye patch in the pictured bird, along with the dark and streaked dorsal appearance, immediately eliminate the Wilson's Phalarope from consideration.

Identifying the mystery photograph now becomes a matter of distinguishing between the two pelagic phalarope species. Most important is to notice that the bill is fine, straight, and sharply pointed. In addition, the neck appears relatively slender, the back is streaked, and the wingtips fall short of the tail. This combination of characteristics indicates that the mystery shorebird is a Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) in juvenal plumage. A similarly plumaged Red Phalarope would appear chunkier and would possess a thicker neck, longer wings, and a noticeably thick, blunt-tipped bill. Furthermore, unless the bird was very young, it would very likely show considerable pale gray feathering on the back and would be devoid of streaking, thus giving a more uniform color to the upperparts.

The Red-necked Phalarope in the picture was photographed at Monomoy in early September.

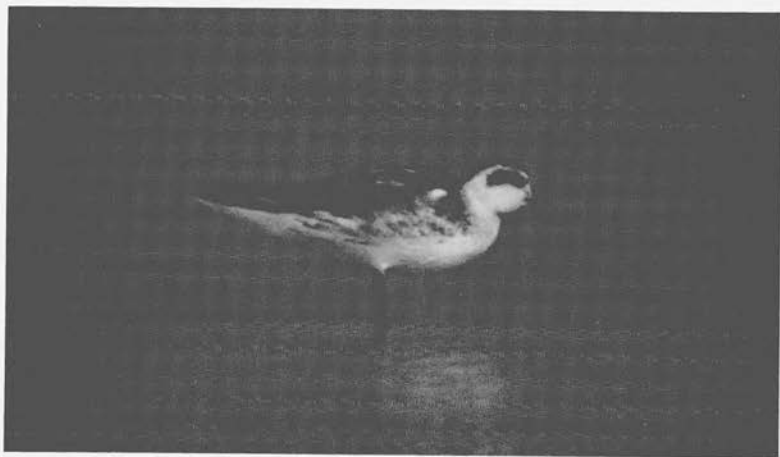


Photo by Wayne R. Petersen

## AT A GLANCE

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Photo by Hal H. Harrison. Courtesy of MAS.



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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