

A Northern Phalarope in Attala County, Mississippi

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On the morning of 11 September 1976 at 09:00, I found a Northern Phalarope (Lobipes lobatus) on the sewage lagoons near the Natchez Trace Parkway at Kosciusko, Attala County, Mississippi.

The weather was fair and the light was good. This bird was swimming in the lagoon approximately 100 meters from me and I observed it for one hour with 10 x 50 binoculars. I immediately knew the bird was a phalarope because of its general shape and manner of swimming and feeding ("whirley-jig" action). This individual was in winter plumage. Compared to illustrations of the Wilson's Phalarope (Steganopus tricolor), this bird was more contrastingly marked, showed a more prominent "eye patch", and had a gray flecking on the side of the breast in front of the wing. It had a black bill and dark-colored legs (which could be seen when the bird rolled over on its side in the water to preen itself). I caused the bird to fly several times by throwing a rock at it and the white stripe in the wing and broken black-white pattern on the rump were prominent.

Later this same day Ray Weeks and I watched this bird at approximately 80 meters and with a better light angle. This time we viewed the bird through a 20x spotting scope. Then we saw minute detail, even the buffy colored wash on its neck. Our bird could have been the very model for Fuerte's painting (the middle bird) in Birds of America (Pearson, 1936, Doubleday and Co., New York). This bird was at the lagoons for three days, the 11th, 12th, and 13th of September. During these three days Ray Weeks and I observed this bird for a total of about four hours each. The phalarope was quite tame, seeming to pay no attention to us.

The Northern Phalarope is an arctic breeder; in the eastern United States it normally migrates along the Atlantic coast and rarely inland (Palmer, in The Shorebirds of North America, G. D. Stout, ed., The Viking Press, New York, 1967). This species was first reported in Louisiana in 1966 (Lowery, Louisiana Birds, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1974). There are several records of the Northern Phalarope in Alabama, including some inland records (Imhof, Alabama Birds, University of Alabama Press, University, 1976). To our knowledge our record represents the first sighting of the species in Mississippi.