

Northern Phalarope in Hattiesburg, Mississippi

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On 21 September 1976 I observed a Northern Phalarope (Lobipes lobatus) swimming around and pecking at the surface of the water in a sewage pond in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The bird was studied leisurely by me and my wife for about a half hour. I would estimate that the bird was about 50 feet away. We were using a 20x telescope and 7 x 50 binoculars. The light conditions were absolutely ideal. The afternoon sun was shining over our shoulders; the sky was clear. I immediately recognized the bird as a phalarope and soon decided that it was not a Wilson's (Steganopus tricolor). (I have seen Wilson's Phalaropes on four occasions.) The bill of this bird was not much longer than the head. This is perhaps only half the length of a Wilson's. The bill was black and very thin. The bird was immaculately white on the face and throat. A very conspicuous phalarope mark went through the eye. It was thicker and much blacker than the mark through the eye in Wilson's Phalaropes that I have seen. The most striking feature of the bird to me was the black (not gray) thick streak that went up the back of the neck and over the top of the head. The forehead of the bird was pure white. Also a pure white area separated the eye mark from the streak up and over the back of the head. The back did not look like the back of a Wilson's at all. On first impression it looked black (not gray) and speckled with white patches. As I watched the bird I realized that the white patches formed streaks that went all the way down the back of the bird. This, it would seem, rules out the Red Phalarope (Phalaropus fulicarius). Also I could see from swimming movements and preening that the legs were quite dark. And I also saw it flap its wings to reveal a wing stripe. The sides of the bird were a little smudged with a gray color but the underparts were pure white. The bird was seen a while later swimming so far out in the middle of the pond that it could be recognized as not much more than a dot with binoculars and as "a phalarope of some kind" with the telescope.

The appearance of this bird was preceded by the passage of a cold front. The bird could not be found on the following day.

Annual Meeting

Plan now to attend the spring meeting of the MOS which will be held on the campus at Mississippi State University from 18-21 May 1977. This special meeting will be in conjunction with the 58th annual meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society. For more information please contact Jerry Jackson, Box Z, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762.