

Documentation  
First State Nesting Record  
Wilson's Phalarope  
(*Steganopus tricolor*)

Mark C. Shieldcastle

Most birders are aware of the sex role reversal in the family Phalaropodidae. In this small and mostly pelagic family it is the female that is brightly colored and the male that incubates the eggs and protects the young. To Ohioans all three species are rare and a real treat when sighted. The most common and least pelagic is the Wilson's Phalarope. This bird is primarily associated with the prairie provinces and states of the North American heartland. The bird can be predictably sighted during both spring and fall migration in the Lake Erie Marsh Region.

Due to the delayed migration of most species in the spring of 1980 several unusual nesters stayed on in the marsh region. I feel that this may be the major factor for Ohio having its first Wilson's Phalarope nesting attempt. Wheaton (1882) reported that the bird was abundant in N. Illinois, a summer resident in N.W. Indiana and probably nests in N.W. Ohio. Kirtland (1838) reported a flock in Trumbull Co., but gave no date. Clark (1970) had two sightings for early June on Grand Lake St. Mary's. Price (1972) gave no reference to the species, even in his "hypothetical list". Wilson (1877) noted that Lake Michigan is the limit of common occurrence in its eastern range. Documented breeding accounts east of this barrier include Lake Co., Indiana (Bent, 1927); Jackson Co., Tuscola Co., and the St. Clair Flats in Michigan (Wood, 1951); and Dunnville in So. Ontario (Bent, 1972).

The nest site is usually constructed in a thin tuft of grass and lined with old grass blades by the male (Wilson, 1877). Eggs are laid in late May and early June with the young hatching usually in the third week of June. The incubation is by the male only with the female acting as the protector. The eggs are ovate pyriform to ovate with a slight gloss and are heavily blotched with brownish-black making them well camouflaged. The young are tawny buff with black spots and are quickly able to fend for themselves.

The Ohio nesting site is that of the original goose flock confinement area in the State's goose management study area known as Ottawa-Crane Creek. It is a heavily managed goose browse area with dense Canada Goose and abundant Blue-wing Teal, Mallard, Killdeer, and Spotted Sandpiper nesting. It consists of level ditches surrounding 40 acres of fields dominated by Aster, Juncus, and Eleocharis. For the Ohio birds making up this record I feel that at least two and maybe a third nest was involved. On June 3 two females and one male were observed in courtship in the north section of the "goose pen" on the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Later a single male was observed shadowing the author during routine state mowing practices in the south section of this pen. On June 4 this bird was again observed during mowing. I observed it from 30 yards until he landed near the unmowed strip. For approximately 5 minutes the bird weaved in and out of the mowed and unmowed sections. It then settled down in a small clump of Eleocharis. I then flushed the bird and marked the nest which contained four eggs. Fortunately the nest was straddled by the tractor on the last round. The Eleocharis, which is very hard to cut cleanly, remained slightly taller affording a little cover. The two females and male were again sighted in the north section insuring that four birds were in the area. On June 6 photographs of the nest and of the male on the nest were taken. The nest was checked at least every other day from a short distance. On Monday, the 16th one egg was

missing and assumed lost to snake depredation. On June 20 all eggs were gone and I feared depredation as I could find no sign of the male or young in the vicinity. On the 22nd I transected the pen to determine if any of the adults remained. No females were sighted but one male was seen in the center section. The male returned to the ground and I entered the section where seen. The bird and two young were found. A third young may have been present as it could have already hidden. The young were banded and photographed. With this the documentation of Ohio's first known Wilson's Phalarope nest was completed.



Wilson Phalarope nest and eggs at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge June 5, 1980 photographed by Mark C. Shieldcastle. Reproduction by Don Tumblin

#### Literature Cited

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