

The Phalarope Conspiracy

As a new member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, I was given Ted Davis's history of the Club from 1873-1986. I had attended monthly meetings as a guest of the Bird Observer staff and enjoyed the mix of members – men and women, young and old – and general atmosphere of congeniality. So I was surprised to read in Ted's engaging history about the controversy around a motion to change the bylaws in the early 1970s (substituting "persons" for "men" interested in ornithology) to allow women to join the club. The motion was tabled, postponing the decision on admitting women into the second century of the Club's history and allowing its centennial "to proceed peacefully, since several members had threatened to resign if women were admitted."

Ted Davis writes that it seemed "odd that the admission of women to the Club would cause such a furor, considering that the Club was well into the latter half of the twentieth century." This "Phalarope conspiracy" he notes, was well underway however, and Kathleen Anderson, then Director of the Manomet Bird Observatory, was the first woman to present a program, and the first official woman guest at a regular meeting. Betty Anderson became the thin edge of the wedge, followed by Deborah Howard, Margaret Argue, Ruth Emery, and others – "the flood gates were open and a tide of women guests was pouring through." In November 1973 Deborah Howard was proposed for membership, and several male members never again attended a meeting, thirty-six years after Margaret Morse Nice became president of the Wilson Ornithological Society (*Bird Observer*, February 2003 p. 18).

I asked Betty Anderson and Deb Howard to write about their experience as birders, not necessarily as "phalaropes." There were rumors of legal action against Harvard University for supporting a sexist organization, and an anonymous phone call to the *Christian Science Monitor* suggesting that there might be militant actions around the centennial. "These allegations," Ted notes, "remain obscure since none of them appear in the Club records, and it is remarkable how many people have somehow forgotten, or never knew." Or, as Betty Anderson wrote in her note to me, times change.

Brooke Stevens



WILSON'S PHALAROPE (FEMALE) BY GEORGE C. WEST