

Observations on a Red Phalarope in Hattiesburg, Mississippi

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A Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) was observed on the sewage lagoons in Hattiesburg, Forrest County, Mississippi between 12 and 15 October 1980. During the two hours of observation on the first morning we were often within two meters of the phalarope. Photographs of the Red Phalarope were secured by Fairley during the first observation on 12 October and on the following days - 13, 14, 15 October - adequately showing field marks including the yellow coloration at the base of the bill, leg color, and overall pattern (Fig. 1). Therefore, plumage

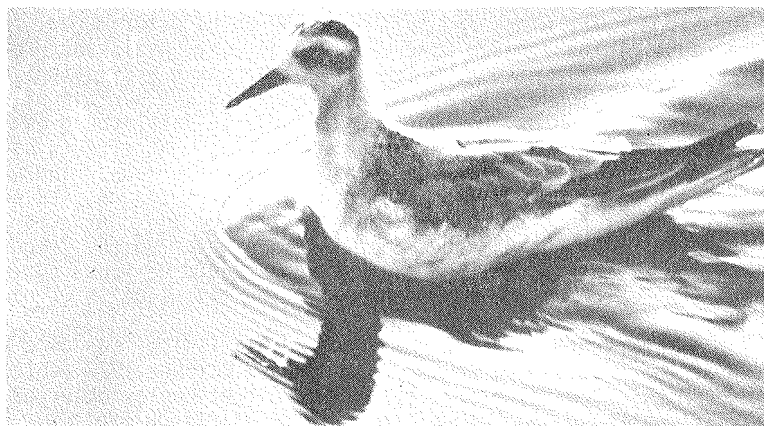


Figure 1. Red Phalarope at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 12-15 Oct. 1980.
Photo by Terrie Fairley.

description has been omitted. The bird was observed until dusk on the afternoon of 15 October and was not seen after this date. The bird was coming into winter plumage and the plumage appearance changed rapidly during the period of observation. The bird appeared to be in excellent physical condition, alert, and very active, searching for and picking food items from the surface of the water. During feeding, the phalarope frequently would wade along the shallow edge, often walking up onto the dry edge to pick an item.

The area which the phalarope occupied was quite small during the early days of observation. Swimming occurred over a distance of 350 m along one levee side of a single pond. Seldom did the phalarope go more than 5 m out into the pond from the levee edge. A thin green film spread along the edge out for several meters on the second day. The phalarope swam out in the clear water at a distance of about 10 m from shore but did move in and out of the green film to pick up a food item. Even when the phalarope was made to fly on several occasions, it would return to the same area after making a wide flight circle or temporarily landing on an adjoining pond.

A shift in location to an adjoining side, less than 200 m away, was noted on 15 October, the last day of observation. The bird was very actively bathing and preening within 7 m of shore. Activities included bobbing up and down, dipping its head into the water and then raising the head and forebody above the water's surface. The wings would be raised slightly from the body and fluffing of the back and wing feathers would accompany these activities. The bathing and meticulous preening exercise lasted about 10 min after which the bird began to swim but with the body submerged to the level of the tail and wings. The wings and tail appeared to be waterlogged. What was the cause of the lowered body level? Jon Juey, Assistant Professor of Environmental Science, University of Southern Mississippi, (pers. comm.) has found oils are often present on the surface of the lagoons. This oil comes from surface drainage in Hattiesburg and the effluent of two nearby meat processing facilities. No effects have been noted on the waterfowl which remain for long periods. The wet but alert phalarope, neck erect and head turning in search, fed as it swam. The phalarope came up onto the asphalt edge and continued preening. Later the bird moved about a half a meter up the levee and stayed under a grass clump. No Red Phalarope could be found during an extensive search of the ponds and along the levees on 16 October.

The first record of a Red Phalarope in Mississippi was of a bird sighted at the Hattiesburg sewage lagoons on 9 October 1977 (Gates and Runzo, Mississippi Kite 8:2, 1978). C. Dwight Cooley observed one in Mississippi Sound about eight km south of Biloxi on September 30, 1978 (Ornithological Records File, Dept. of Biological Sciences, Mississippi State University). This paper reports on the third Red

Phalarope reported in Mississippi and the second from the sewage lagoons in Hattiesburg. Copies of photographs are on file at the John Martin Frazier Museum of Natural Science and in the Department of Biological Sciences, Mississippi State University.

A Flock of Franklin's Gulls in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi

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On 10 November 1980 we found a flock of 22 Franklin's Gulls (Larus pipixcan) at rest on a mudflat off Bay St. Louis beach in Hancock County. The birds were seen at about 11:30 from as close as 40 meters through binoculars and 20X spotting scopes. The sky was slightly overcast, creating excellent light conditions; the temperature was about 68° F., and the winds were out of the southeast at 6-8 km/h.

We first noticed the species by its much darker head, relative to that of a Laughing Gull (L. atricilla). All of the gulls were adults in winter plumage, and showed a sooty gray area around the back of the heads extending around the eyes, surrounding a clean white eye-ring. The face, underparts, rump, and tail of each were white; the mantle and wings were dark blue-gray. The outer primaries were black, showing a considerable amount of white on both sides of them. The Franklin's Gulls were noticeably smaller than two Laughing Gulls which stood with the flock. Their thin bills were dark, as were their legs and feet.

After watching them at rest for about 5 minutes, Hodges flushed the flock, so that the white "windows" were observed between the black and gray primaries. The birds flew south out of sight, and were not seen again.

This record represents a high number for the state; previous sightings have been of single birds. All records for Alabama (Imhof, Alabama Birds, University of Alabama Press, University, 1976) are also of single birds, but in Louisiana (Lowery, Louisiana Birds, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1974) 175 birds in two flocks were seen over Lake Pontchartrain in the fall of 1959.