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Northern Phalarope at Pascagoula - First Photographic Record*

For Mississippi

Judith A. Toups	Malcolm B. Hodges	Peter V. Donaldson
4 Hartford Place	9 Arbor Circle	501 Patton Avenue
Gulfport, Ms. 39501	Ocean Springs, Ms. 39564	Biloxi, Ms. 39531

On 6 June 1979, JAT and MBH found a Northern Phalarope (Lobipes lobatus), in the northernmost diked pond of the area known as the Pascagoula River Marsh in Jackson County, Ms. This represents the first spring record and the fourth state record of this species in the state. The 6 June observation was of a bird believed to be a male Northern Phalarope coming into breeding plumage ... its coloration was not as bright as suggested in current field guides. It was immediately recognized as to species by the presence very close by of a female Wilson's Phalarope, (Steganopus tricolor). We observed that the Northern Phalarope was notably smaller though somewhat chunkier in appearance ... with a shorter, thicker neck and a thin, needle-like bill which was short by comparison with the bill of a Wilson's Phalarope. The bird was active, swimming and spinning constantly.

On the following day, 7 June, PVD secured photographs of the bird which adequately show color and pattern, hence we have omitted the plumage description. PVD observed the phalarope until mid-afternoon of the 7th, but it was not seen thereafter.

The Northern Phalarope is of rare occurrence, not only in coastal Mississippi, but throughout the interior of the United States as well, it being a bird of the open oceans and, in migration, of coastal bays. The species was first seen in Mississippi by James A. Sanders, in Attala County, on 11 September 1976 (Sanders 1976). That bird was present from 11-13 September and was also observed by Ray Weeks. On 21 September 1976 another winter-plumaged Northern Phalarope was found by Larry Gates at the Hattiesburg lagoons in Forrest County (Gates 1976). It could not be located on the following day. The first coastal occurrence of the species was noted on 10 September 1977 by JAT, Kim Eckert, and Robert P.

*Photo on file at Mississippi State University

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Russell, a winter plumaged bird at the Pascagoula area as described above (Weber and Jackson 1978).

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A Brant on East Ship Island: First Record for Mississippi

Wayne C. Weber

Dept. of Biological Sciences, Mississippi State University
 Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762

On 1 July 1978, while on the east spit of East Ship Island, I discovered an adult Brant (Branta bernicla) feeding along the edge of a shallow pond. I watched the bird from about 15:00 to 15:30, using a 15-45X spotting scope at distances of 20-125 m. The Brant could fly quite well, although it appeared to have a slight limp when walking.

Field notes made on the spot are as follows: "A small, short-necked goose appearing not much larger than Mallard. Head and neck black except for small horizontal white mark ("half-collar") on each side of neck. Back dark brown, wings somewhat darker. Tail black; rump white or pale. Underparts white (esp. abdomen and under-tail coverts) except for some brownish on flanks and upper breast. Bill and legs black." This clearly describes an adult Brant of the eastern or Atlantic race, Branta bernicla hrota.

Brant are occasionally kept in captivity, and it is possible that the bird I saw was an escaped captive. For an opinion on this matter, I wrote Richard Ryan, director of the Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange, N.J., who is quite knowledgeable about the frequency with which various bird species are kept in captivity. Mr. Ryan's reply (letter of 29 September 1978) reads in part: "... Atlantic race Brant are fairly rare in captivity and most of those found in ... collections are "salvaged" birds, i.e., cripples placed in captivity because of ... wing damage ... Atlantic Brant are notoriously difficult to breed in captivity, and ... tend to lay eggs in June, so that the usual source of escapes (young of the year) would be almost impossible in a fully-feathered, flying bird in July.