

Sight records of Wilson's Phalarope, Ruff, and other shorebirds from Venezuela

Allen Altman and Chris Parrish

ON NOVEMBER 5, 1977 at about 11:30 a.m. Altman observed a Wilson's Phalarope (*Steganopus tricolor*) in the Refugio de Fauna Silvestre de Cuare near Chichiriviche, Estado Falcón, Venezuela. This apparently represents the first record of this American shorebird from Venezuela. It first attracted his attention by landing near the edge of a large brackish lagoon about five m from shore and immediately began swimming. For a short time it made quick darting movements with its bill at the water's surface, presumably catching flies or minute aquatic life, but it was not observed swimming in small circles phalarope-style. Later it walked ashore where it continued feeding near a small group of Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla* and *C. pusilla*) and Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*). Subsequently it entered the water and resumed swimming and feeding.

Parrish rediscovered the bird in the same area two days later and watched it swim and walk along the shoreline in one cm of water, catching flies on nearby Salicornia. The following is condensed from our field notes:

Body size and proportions (except for smaller head and shorter legs) rather close to those of Lesser Yellowlegs but a little smaller overall. Bill black, longer than head, exceedingly thin and straight. Crown, hindneck and back uniform light brownish gray. Wings darker, darkest on the primaries, without light wing-stripe. Thin eyestripe and postocular sooty. Forehead, face, throat, foreneck, breast and undertail coverts white. Flanks washed with light brownish gray. Rump white. Tail with a light grayish terminal area. Legs yellowish.

Both authors were familiar with Wilson's

Phalarope in California. The bird superficially resembled a Lesser Yellowlegs, especially the back pattern in flight, but the clean white underparts and face, the dark postocular, the very narrow bill and the general shape serve to distinguish the two easily. The back pattern and bill shape ruled out the other two phalaropes.

ON NOVEMBER 18, 1977, thirteen days after the initial sighting of the phalarope, both authors returned together in hopes of obtaining a further sighting. Less than two km distant, we discovered a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) feeding with a large flock of Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) in a small, recently formed, freshwater pool. The following description is condensed from our field notes:

Size and proportions those of Greater Yellowlegs. Bill black longer than head and about as long as the bills of nearby Lesser Yellowlegs, hence much shorter (and rather thicker) than in Greater Yellowlegs. Crown feathers brown, rather plush, giving a "capped" appearance. Eyestripe present but inconspicuous. Throat and undertail coverts white. Face, forehead and flanks whitish, washed with light brown. Foreneck and breast buffy. Back brown, lightly scalloped with buffy whitish. Wings brown, every covert and tertial sharply margined with a thin, light border. Primaries long and broad; quills white, giving the folded wing a striped appearance. Rump blackish, bordered laterally by long, broad, white, oval patches which join towards the rear to form a broad V- or U-shaped rump patch. Tail dark. Underwing linings pure white, contrasting with brownish underparts when the bird is in flight. Legs dull yellowish.

Altman is familiar with the Ruff in both breeding and winter plumage in Norway and Denmark, and with one individual in winter

plumage studied at length in California. The tail pattern, size, scaly appearance, straight, medium-length bill, and buffy foreneck and breast rule out all other shorebirds.

Wilson's Phalarope breeds in the interior of North America and winters in southern South America. It is recorded in transit in western Ecuador and Colombia, and in Central America. Phelps and Phelps (*Lista de las Aves de Venezuela con su Distribución*, Tomo II, Parte 1, Caracas, 1957) opined that Wilson's Phalarope (p. 16) would probably be found in Venezuela, but they apparently could not state positively that it had occurred. Moreover, vagrants have been observed in Jamaica, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Barbados (Bond, *Birds of the West Indies*, 1974) and in interior Brazil in Mato Grosso (de Schauensee, *The Species of Birds of South America with their Distribution*, 1966).

The Ruff is, of course, a Eurasian bird, but it has been reported frequently from North America. Antillean records were sufficiently numerous for Bond (*op. cit.*) to include the species in the main text rather than in his "List of Vagrants." Indeed, he notes it as "a frequent visitor to Barbados." The only previous South American record is from Colombia, but, according to Blake (*Manual of Neotropical Birds*, p. 592, 1977), it is "based solely on a skin of 'Bogotá' make and is questionable." However, after mentioning one record each for Guatemala and Panama and

two observations for Trinidad, Blake surmises that "accidental occurrences on the South American mainland are likely."

IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE new records for Venezuela, the series of fall shorebird censuses carried out by the authors in 1975, 1976 and 1977 at the Refugio de Fauna Silvestre de Cuare has resulted in observations of several other shorebird species only rarely recorded in Venezuela. Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*), a species previously known in Venezuela from only two specimens (Phelps and Phelps, *op. cit.*) was sighted Oct. 18, 1975 and Nov. 1, 1975. Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*), known in Venezuela from only one specimen (*op. cit.*) was recorded Sept. 28, 1975 (two individuals), Sept. 10, 1977 (two individuals) and Sept. 17, 1977 (one individual). Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), not previously reported from the Venezuelan mainland, (although reported resident in the Dutch and Venezuelan islands of the southern Caribbean), has been found to be regular in small numbers (up to seven individuals) in September and October of all three years.

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Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts

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THIS NOTE IS SUBMITTED ON behalf of my colleagues Allan R. Keith, Charles W. Lincoln, Richard M. Sargent, E. Manning Sears — and myself.

At approximately 10 a.m. on February 18, 1978, we arrived at the northwest corner of Menemsha Pond preparatory to birding the area. Manning Sears was the first to spot a large shorebird standing among gulls on a sandspit approximately one-half mile to the

east. Through binoculars we could discern that the bird was a curlew, and the expectation was that it would be a Whimbrel, which would have been unusual enough at this time of year. However, the first look through our scopes — ranging from 20x to 40x — made it clear that here was no Whimbrel. The bill was too long and the bird appeared to be plain-headed, lacking the Whimbrel's bold stripes. The bird, also, was immense —