

## NOTES

### UPDATE ON THE STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF WILSON'S PHALAROPE AND YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER IN ALASKA

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The Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) and the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) are relatively recent additions to Alaska's avifauna. The first observations of the Wilson's Phalarope in Alaska were made in 1962, at the Columbia Creek Flats on 20 May (64° 26' N, 141° 25' W) (Kessel and Springer 1966) and at Barrow on 9 June (Pitelka 1974). The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was first observed in Alaska on 16 June 1976, near Northway Junction (Kessel 1986). Kessel and Gibson (1994) suggested a northwestward range expansion for the Wilson's Phalarope into Alaska, and we support that conclusion by reporting the first documented evidence for breeding of this species in the state. Here we also report on the westernmost breeding and occurrence records for the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and suggest a continental westward range expansion for this species.

The Wilson's Phalarope breeds in wetlands of western provinces and states of North America (American Ornithologists' Union 1998). Recent range expansion of this species is suggested by an increasing number of breeding records from the Pacific Northwest (Colwell and Jehl 1994), from the southern Yukon (Godfrey 1986) to British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1990). This species' breeding range had reached as far northwest as southwestern Yukon Territory by the late 1970s (Kessel and Gibson 1994), although the extension of the known range into the Yukon may coincide with increased survey effort in and around wetlands (C. D. Eckert pers. comm.). The breeding records for the Wilson's Phalarope closest to Alaska have been at the only two confirmed breeding sites in Yukon Territory, near Whitehorse (Sinclair et al. 2003).

Since the 1980s, the Wilson's Phalarope has occurred erratically and in small numbers in late spring and summer in Alaska. The only prior suggestion of breeding in the state is records of juvenal-plumaged birds. A young male collected on 24 July 1985 near Fairbanks (University of Alaska Museum [UAM] 5247) constitutes the first record of a Wilson's Phalarope of this age in Alaska (*Am. Birds* [AB] 39:952). A sitenacious pair of birds in Anchorage during the summer of 1988, and a subsequent observation of a young bird in the same area, suggested that the pair might have bred there (AB 42:1330). On 22 July 2001, two young Wilson's Phalaropes were recorded in Anchorage (*N. Am. Birds* [NAB] 55:471).

On 22 June 2001, DeCicco observed a male Wilson's Phalarope on Canvasback Lake, Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge (66° 23' N, 146° 22' W). The nest was located when he flushed the bird from vegetation and watched it perform a broken-wing display (NAB 55:471). The phalarope had built its nest on the ground, on a small grassy island, surrounded by reeds (*Sparganium* sp.). The nest, lined with the grasses *Puccinellia borealis* and *Scolochloa festucacea*, contained three small, dark green eggs with black flecks. Also on the island, located within 25 m of the Wilson's Phalarope nest, was a nesting colony of Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*). Many Red-necked Phalaropes (*P. lobatus*) were observed in the immediate area. On 2 July, the Wilson's Phalarope nest contained four eggs. On 11 July, the nest was empty and the male was seen with what appeared to be food in its beak (D. W. Shaw in litt.). The male repeatedly landed in the same location on the island, approximately 30 m from the nest; the observer assumed that young were in the immediate vicinity.

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The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker breeds in forests of quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), birch (*Betula* sp.), maple (*Acer* sp.), and mixed conifers (Short 1982, Eberhardt 1994, Winkler et al. 1995) from the eastern interior of Alaska (Walters et al. 2002), southwestern Yukon Territory, and northeastern British Columbia (Godfrey 1986) east across southern Canada east of the Rockies and in the United States from the Great Lakes area east to New England and south through the Appalachians to northwestern Georgia (American Ornithologists' Union 1998). Kessel (1986) described the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker as having been more widely distributed in Alaska in the recent past than it is today, relying on old scars of sap wells on paper birch trees (*Betula papyrifera*) as evidence for this conclusion. She reported scarred birch trees as common as far northwest as 20 km west of Fairbanks (64° 52' N, 147° 49' W) and as far southwest as the upper Susitna River Valley (62° 47' N, 147° 57' W), with some west to Ruby, northwest to 33 km southwest of Walker Lake, and north to the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Koyukuk River. These sap-well scars may represent migrants, however, and do not provide evidence of a prior more extensive breeding range.

Almost all Alaska sight records are from the upper Tanana River drainage, in the eastern interior from Northway Junction to the Canadian boundary at Scottie Creek (Gibson and Kessel 1992). Prior to the breeding we report, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker had been recorded breeding in Alaska only twice, both times in the vicinity of Northway Junction (Kessel 1986). Since 1983, this species has been recorded with some regularity at Ten Mile Lake, 9 km southeast of Northway, in Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge (T. J. Doyle and K. Larson in litt.). On 14 June 1995 Doyle (in litt.) found an active nest at Ten Mile Lake.

On 30 May 2001, A. M. Benson detected an active Yellow-bellied Sapsucker nest at the Bonanza Creek Experimental Station (64° 43' N, 148° 19' W), 7.8 km southwest of Fairbanks (NAB 55:471). The nest cavity was monitored every 2–4 days until the young fledged on 8 July 2001. E. Clark and J. D. Levison (pers. comm.) observed the male and two fledglings foraging from sap wells in the area on 14 July 2001. The cavity was 14 m up in a 27.8-m living quaking aspen (diameter at breast height 36 cm).

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has also been observed recently at other western locations in the interior of the state. An adult female was captured at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Fairbanks on 19 May 1999 (UAM 9048). In June 2002, Rozell observed a male drumming and excavating a nest cavity in the Bonanza Creek Experimental Station, though the bird was never detected with a mate. On several occasions, observers saw this male calling from within the previous year's successful Yellow-bellied Sapsucker nesting cavity. Also in 2002, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was heard drumming in the Rosie Creek drainage, west of Fairbanks, on 5 June (M. Allen in litt.). Given that the distance between these two observations was roughly 40 km, they were likely different individuals.

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