

Documentation of Unusual Sighting - WILSON'S PHALAROPE (JUVENILE)

This bird was at Riverton GMA, Fremont County July 15. It was feeding near the ~~shore~~ shoreline in dead weeds, mostly on foot, but occasionally in deeper water. A few peep were present (mostly Least; some Semiplamated), and some Killdeer. Bob Myers and I observed the bird in excellent light conditions.

It was first noticed as a tall-appearing, buffy-colored shorebird with yellow legs (at least as bright as Least Sandpiper) and a black bill. When first seen it was wading and we first were puzzled by its identity. However further examination revealed:

1. Yellow legs
2. Black bill, straight, rather thin, about length of head or slightly longer.
- ~~Prominent black~~
3. Prominent black eye-line, straight, extending from bill (ie lores were black), back to just behind the eye.
4. Mantle and coverts brownish, feathers edged pale buffy. About same as Pectoral Sandpipers this time of year (adults without the chestnut edgings on mantle feathers), perhaps a little paler.
5. Sides of neck no obvious pattern, but brownish suffusion down onto sides of breast.
6. Underparts white.
7. When bird finally waded into deeper water, began to act like a phalarope: spinning, rapid movements. It had not done this when first observed, and looked very strange, like a combination of various other species.

The bird was not seen in flight, and so diagnostic white rump not seen. No calls heard. Was with another (female adult) Wilson's Phalarope. Same size, shape, and movements.

The juvenile Wilson's Phalarope is shown in a color plate in Cramp et al, (Handbook of the Birds of Europe the Middle East and North Africa; Vol III: Waders to Gulls) on page 640. The bird seen at Riverton appeared identical to the one pictured.

Other species we considered (albeit briefly) were:

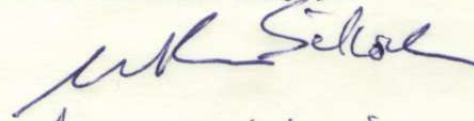
Ruff: eliminated by bill size and shape (thin and straight, rather than fairly heavy and thick-based with a slight droop); also eliminated by phalarope feeding actions.

Some far out of range Tringa (eg ~~Wood~~ Sandpiper^{or juv Redshank}): legs relatively short; also phalarope feeding actions.

This bird would have to have been hatched very early to have been here so early; alternatively it may have been hatched rather close by, perhaps even in the county. Frances Moore and I saw two Wilson's Phalaropes (age not determined) in flight at Riverton July 1, also a rather suggestive date.

After consulting Johnsgard (Birds of the Great Plains) Ross Silcock July 31.

I strongly suspect this bird was hatched at Riverton. According to Johnsgard, the current habitat at Riverton fits perfectly the criteria suggested by Johnsgard.


(Typed from notes taken immediately after observation)