

SECOND INLAND
RED PHALAROPE RECORD IN ALABAMA

Helen Kittinger and Jack N. Carusos

On October 20, 1968 a first year Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) was observed by Helen Kittinger and Jack Carusos at Rutherford Lake, 12 miles south of Birmingham on Alabama 21. It was seen in good light and up to a distance of 30 feet.

The bird was identified as a phalarope by its typical phalarope shape and habit of swimming and spinning in the water. Its bill was short, thick and coal black with a very slight suggestion of yellow at its base. The phalarope had a gray unstreaked back and in flight showed a white wing stripe. There was a short black line extending narrowly in front of the eye and broadly behind it. As it walked on land the legs were observed to be dull green. A dark round circle on the back of the head extended in a line down the back of the neck into the gray back. This description is in accordance with the plumage of a juvenile Red Phalarope in Parmer and Clem's *The Shorebirds of North America*, p. 263-4; "Juvenile plumage, both sexes—much like definitive



Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) — photo by Helen Kittinger, October 20, 1968,

basic, but dark on rear of crown continues down nape to join mantle. . .”

The Red Phalarope was separated from the Wilson's Phalarope (Steganopus tricolor) by its short, thick, bill and white wing stripe, and from the Northern Phalarope (Lobipes, lobatus) by its unstreaked back and bill shape.

This species is considered the most maritime of the oceanic phalarope family. The phalarope is reported regularly off the coast of Alabama, but the Montgomery, 1924, sighting is the only previous inland record (Alabama Birds, Imhof, p. 263).

Earlier in the week a tropical disturbance moved from the Gulf of Mexico across the Florida Peninsula and out into the Atlantic Ocean. Whether this storm played any part in the phalarope's appearance is not known, but it was primarily responsible for the observers canvassing ponds and lakes looking for "hurricane refugees".

The Red Phalarope was studied most of the day by a total of twenty-two people equipped with all power binoculars and zoom telescopes. Color photographs were made by Helen Kittinger. A subsequent check of the lake the next several days showed that the bird had left.

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