

## Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) Susquehanna River - Dauphin County

**May 16, 1997**

On Friday, May 16, I observed 4 Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*) on the Susquehanna River north of the Rockville Bridge in Dauphin County. Dan Bogar found an adult Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*) on the river the evening of May 15. Ramsay Koury arrived at Dan's home, which is on the river front in Marysville on the western bank of the river. While they were watching the gull, they observed several small birds out in the middle of the river. Ramsay identified them as Red-necked Phalaropes - 10 of them. On the morning of May 16, Ramsay and I were able to relocate 4 of the phalaropes. We observed them from 7:30 to 8:45 am and then from 3:00 to 5:00 pm from Dan's front yard.

### **Description:**

The birds were viewed out in the middle of the Susquehanna River very distant (400 - 500 yards) and difficult to see well. Birds were small shorebirds - much smaller than Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) - the only species nearby. In the morning, the lighting was poor, but in the afternoon it was much better. When sitting on the water they were small with a thin neck. Top of head was black, sides of neck had reddish color. White throat and lower face patch was visible. The easiest time to pick the birds out was when they were facing us and the white on the throat and breast stood out. In the afternoon, at a few times when the sun would peak out of the clouds, the streaks on the back were visible.

The bill was difficult to see, but in good afternoon light we could see that it was long, dark and thin - about the same length as the head - although this was difficult to determine at that distance. In flight a dark rump and white wing bars were visible. Three of the birds appeared to be female, one of those in fairly bright plumage. The fourth bird was pretty dull, probably a male. In the morning the phalaropes were hanging around a reed bed and were difficult to locate. They kept disappearing in the grasses. In the afternoon they were more active on the open river, flying upriver until they were almost directly across from us, then floating down river 300 yards or so. They repeated this constantly throughout the afternoon observation. While floating they would poke at the surface of the water with their bills.

### **Discussion:**

The fact that these birds were shorebirds floating in the middle of the river immediately indicated phalarope. Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) would not normally be expected to be observed swimming in the middle of a large river like the Susquehanna, but the observation of the dark rump and wing bars in flight definitely rule out that species. Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) would appear larger and more robust with a heavier neck and thicker and slightly

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shorter bill. Also a bird of that species in alternate plumage would be much more extensively red on the under parts - not limited to just the sides of the neck.

These observations were made with a Kowa TSN-2 spotting scope. In the afternoon the sky was partly cloudy and there was excellent lighting when the sun appeared from behind the clouds. My experience with Red-necked Phalarope is limited to observations of a few birds in basic plumage from a boat off of the Outer Banks of North Carolina. I have observed Wilson's Phalaropes many times along the Delaware coastal refuges and in Colorado, Arizona and Texas. I have seen them twice in Pennsylvania (including one that same day in western Cumberland County). My Red Phalarope observations are limited to two individuals seen in Pennsylvania, both in basic plumage. One at Codorus State Park in York County and another on the Susquehanna River at Marietta in Lancaster County.

Probably the most interesting aspect of this occurrence of Red-necked Phalarope in Pennsylvania is the number of individuals. I searched through the back issues of *Pennsylvania Birds* and found 33 reports of this species in the state since 1987. All but 3 of those reports were of single birds. Of the remaining 3 reports, two were of 2 individuals and one was a report of 3 individuals. Although I didn't see the flock of ten on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the group of four on the 16<sup>th</sup> was still an unusual inland sighting for Pennsylvania.

#### References:

- Hayman, P, J. Marchant and T. Prater. 1986. *Shorebirds: an identification guide*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA
- National Geographic Society. 1987. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.
- Haas, F., and B. Haas (eds). 1987-1996. *Pennsylvania Birds*. Narvon, PA

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**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

Date of Sighting: 16 May 1997 to 16 May 1997

Location: SUSQUEHANNA RIVER

County: DAUPHIN

Observer(s): Don Henise

Ramsay Koury

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Don Henise

Written Description: YES

Photo: NO

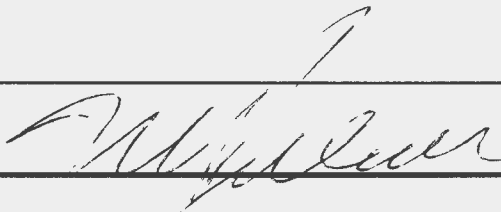
Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

| Member        | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV | Class V |   |   | Abstain |
|---------------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|---|---|---------|
|               |         |          |           |          | A       | B | C |         |
| F. Haas       |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |
| P. Schwalbe   |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |
| K. Parkes     |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |
| R. Ickes      |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |
| P. Hess       |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |
| J. McWilliams |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |
| T. Floyd      |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |
| TOTALS        |         |          | 7         |          |         |   |   |         |
| DECISION      |         |          | X         |          |         |   |   |         |

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

6/26/97