

331-01-1993

Rare Bird Report

Fourth record of Red Phalarope

Phalaropus fulicarius

for Centre County

Ted Floyd

Joseph Zurovchak and I saw a Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) at Bald Eagle State Park in Centre County at 1545 hr on Friday 5 November 1993. This species is classified as "casual" in Pennsylvania (Santner *et al.* 1992), and the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee requires documentation for all records of this species outside of Erie County (Kwater 1990). According to Wood (1983), there are two records of Red Phalarope from Centre County (4 October 1946 and 18 May 1980). Additionally, there is a third Centre County record from 19 October 1980 (J.D. Peplinski, *personal communication*).

Between 1300-1400 hr on 5 November there was constant moderate rainfall across Centre County, associated with weak winds from the northeast. By 1500 hr the rain had stopped, but much of Bald Eagle State Park was covered in patchy dense fog. It was unusually warm during the afternoon (the temperature was as high as 17° C).

Almost immediately upon reaching the tip of a concrete pier overlooking Foster Joseph Sayer Lake at Bald Eagle State Park, I noticed a pale shorebird at the edge of a mudflat about 10 m below and 20 m away. The bird instantly suggested a phalarope. Closer inspection, with 10X binoculars and a 45X telescope, proved the bird to be a Red Phalarope.

The bird's head and underparts were gleaming white. The bird showed a distinct black post-ocular patch, plus a well-developed black patch extending from the center of the crown to the middle of the nape. The bird's upperparts were an almost perfectly uniform pale gray. When the bird was resting, its scapulars and wing coverts appeared to be the same shade of pale gray as across the mantle. Certainly, no contrasting long whitish stripes were present. Those portions of the bird's flight and tail feathers that were visible appeared to be noticeably darker than the rest of the bird's upperparts. The bird's black bill, about as long as its head, struck me as being much thicker than the bills of Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*) and especially Wilson's Phalaropes (*Phalaropus tricolor*) that I was able to study earlier this year in the southwest. In particular, the bird's bill as observed from above, did not at all convey the needlelike impression of the two other phalarope species. I could not discern any yellow in the bird's bill.

The bird was quite active. It waded at the edge of the mudflat, it waded in deeper water, and it swam around quite a bit. It probed for food with sudden single stabs at the mud or water. At several points, it swam to within about 5 meters of the edge of the pier, thus allowing excellent viewing of its thick bill and uniformly gray upperparts. It twice took flight. Both times it uttered a single sharp "wink" note. In flight, it showed a conspicuous whitish wing stripe and dark central tail coverts. Also, the bird in flight showed uniformly pale gray scapulars, wing coverts, and mantle; there was no indication of contrasting whitish borders to the scapulars.

The bird's identification as one of the two marine phalaropes was straightforward. Its uniformly gray upperparts and relatively thick bill were very carefully observed, frequently at very close range, and pinpoint the bird's identification to species. Although I carefully studied the bird's jizz, I do not have sufficient recent experience with either marine phalarope species to offer any comments about this supposedly important (*e.g.*, see Hayman *et al.* 1986) aspect of the bird's identification.

I observed the bird for at least 30 min. There was quite a bit of fog present, although there was virtually none between the bird and me. It was a dark and overcast day, but I did not feel hindered in my attempts to study the Red Phalarope. There were no other birds in the immediate area. A small flock of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and 4 Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) were farther away. Various observers looked for the bird the next morning, but it had disappeared before anybody arrived.

It may interest some people to know that the Red Phalarope was seen on *exactly* the same mudflat at which a Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) was seen in early November 1992, also in association with an easterly storm system. Both rarities were seen on days that featured numerous other very uncommon species for Centre County. Altogether, I have had only 5 good days in my 3 years of birding at Bald Eagle State Park, and all 5 days were associated with storms, often from the east. My experiences at Bald Eagle State Park further demonstrate the very real connection between stormy weather and unusual birds in Pennsylvania (*e.g.*, see Boyle *et al.* 1989; Schutsky 1990).

Literature cited:

Boyle, W.J., R.O. Paxton, and D.A. Cutler. 1989. Hudson-Delaware Region. *American Birds* 43:454-458.

Kwater, E. 1990. Official list of the birds of Pennsylvania. *Pennsylvania Birds* 4:51-53.

Hayman, P., J. Marchant, and T. Prater. 1986. *Shorebirds: an Identification Guide*. Houghton Mifflin.

Santner, S.J., D.W. Brauning, G. Schwalbe, and P.W. Schwalbe. 1992. *Annotated List of the Birds of Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania Biological Survey.

Schutsky, R.M. 1990. Storm Birds on the Lower Susquehanna. *Pennsylvania Birds* 4:47-48.

Wood, M. 1983. *Birds of Central Pennsylvania*. State College Bird Club.

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicaria*)

Date of Sighting: 5 November 1993 to 5 November 1993

Location: BALD EAGLE STATE PARK

County: CENTRE

Observer(s): Ted Floyd

Joseph Zurovchak

Date of Submission: 1993

Submitted by: Ted Floyd

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					
N. Pulcinella			X					
E. Kwater			X					
R. Ickes			X					
G. McWilliams			X					
P. Schwalbe			X					
J. Skinner			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

L. C. Haas

Date:

9-25-94