

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE AT WASHDYKE LAGOON

On 19/3/61, with D. H. Brathwaite of Christchurch, I visited the Washdyke Lagoon. We traversed the seaward side of the lagoon, and reached a series of brackish pools, which stretch for two miles to the north.

In a pool fairly heavily covered with greenish algae and weed, a small bird about the size of a Pectoral Sandpiper was noticed. It was swimming along with quite a jerky movement and gave the impression that it was walking along in water up to its belly, this being impossible because of the depth of the water. Our presence caused it to rise; but it immediately settled again several yards away. At this stage I was certain the bird was a phalarope, D.H.B. agreeing. Half an hour's observation through telescope from separate vantage points allowed us to compile individual notes on the bird. As it was in winter plumage and neither D.H.B. nor myself were certain of the diagnostic characters separating the species, I returned to the car for the field guides, while D.H.B. continued observation.

On my return we checked text and illustrations in Pough (Audubon Waterbird Guide) Petersen (Birds of Britain and Europe) and Witherby (Handbook of British Birds). From these it was apparent that the bird could only be a Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). The straight needle-like black bill and the streaked appearance of the back were noted by both of us. The black patch about the eye was quite noticeable. During my absence the bird had flown a short distance enabling D.H.B. to note the dark upper wing with the conspicuous narrow white bar. Although the bird would not permit as close an approach as a Pectoral Sandpiper, observed the previous week-end at Lake Ellesmere, it would not fly more than a few yards. Otherwise it was completely indifferent to our presence. D.H.B. noticed that it seemed equally indifferent to the presence of a Harrier (*Circus approximans*) which flew quite close while I was away. On my return to the pool it was standing at the water's edge and we noticed the peculiar long-bodied appearance, as described in Witherby's Handbook of British Birds.

This peculiarity seemed to be due to a combination of a small head and long under tail coverts. On the water while resting the head was drawn into the shoulders, but when feeding the head was held fairly high and the tail low, giving the bird a peculiar 'sit' on the water. The sketch on p. 137 of Petersen's (Birds of Britain and Europe) is a perfect illustration of the bird as regards plumage pattern and the above described 'sit.' Having the field-guides on hand made it possible to identify the Red-necked Phalarope with absolute certainty. As it fed, short sharp jabs were made amongst the weed and its whole body moved, giving a very definite, yet jerky feeding movement. In my absence the bird came to the water's edge, where it stood preening for some time. This unexpected appearance of the Red-necked Phalarope is the third record for New Zealand and the first for 26 years; the other records being at Lake Ellesmere in 1929 and the Wanganui Estuary in 1935.

On my return to Wanganui, Mr. M. J. G. Smart was able to show me the specimen found in 1935, which is now preserved as a mounted specimen in the Wanganui Public Museum. Although the specimen in the Wanganui Museum is in a summer plumage and is not mounted in a posture similar to that observed in the field, the general characters are the same as those observed at Washdyke Lagoon.

— D. E. CROCKETT