

We would be interested to know how widespread this behaviour is at present among sparrows in other parts of New Zealand, and whether species such as Starlings or Mynas copy them. Many new Japanese cars have a shield below the radiator, and access for sparrows could be more restricted in future. If you have any records, please let JECF know.

LITERATURE CITED

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Red-necked Phalarope at Mangere, Manukau Harbour

Prompted by a report of a suspected Marsh Sandpiper seen flying with stilts, we spent the afternoon of 6 June 1985 at the ponds of the AMDB and, after a normal round, concentrated our attention on an area of extensions beside pond No. 4. Here earthworks have been in progress for some years. Formerly, much of this area was a mangrove creek and swamp, tidal but spring-fed, and running up to the lower slopes of Mangere Mountain. Among the new stopbanks were several pools, which recent heavy rains had enlarged and freshened. There was a lush growth of aquatic plants, especially willow weed (*Polygonum persicaria*); and despite the proximity of mid-winter's day, there were fully open flowers among the scattered patches of bachelor's button (*Cotula* sp.). TGL noted that the pools were alive with *Daphnia*, copepods and the larvae commonly known as bloodworms (*Chironomus* sp.).

These pools are much frequented by stilts, and seemed to offer the most likely chance of finding one of the shanky waders. From the top of a stopbank, a small grey wader was just glimpsed at the far end of one of the larger pools, before it was lost to view among the willow weed. When, at length it emerged swimming, TGL at once exclaimed "phalarope", even though he had never seen one before. Of course he was right. But the important thing now was to make certain of its identity because, *mirabile dictu*, all three species of phalarope are on the official New Zealand list. The car was driven closer by slow stages; and shortly, with the sun at our backs, we were able to take our time examining what was clearly a very alert and active Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). In size it was comparable with a Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*). Of special note were its fine straight bill, a patch of red on the side of the middle neck, and its habit of swimming high in the water with a jerky bobbing motion with sudden turns and darting stabs to the right and left. Above the eye was a dab of white, not worthy of being called a stripe.

Disturbed by a workman's heavy rumbling vehicle, the phalarope took off, springing like a teal from the water. For a short while it flew with some stilts, easily keeping pace with them, and sometimes in the lead. Then it set off alone on a towering flight, covering several miles and reaching an estimated height of 1000 feet, before returning with a swift descent to a larger adjacent pool. Here it swam and bobbed in the open, but the water was ruffled by the wind and it soon took off again. After a second extensive flight before our straining eyes, it came back to the more sheltered pool where we had first found it. Even small isolated clumps of *Polygonum* or *Cotula* could conceal it effectively. Some stilts had also returned, but the phalarope tended to keep to itself. Occasional Welcome Swallows appeared to go out of their way to swoop low over it. A soft call from the phalarope was written down as *chet-chet*.

Red-necked Phalaropes must be among the most versatile of birds. Though essentially waterfowl, and pelagic in their winter quarters, they are known to be capable of long, non-stop overland flights, which may take them from the subarctic to the tropics or vice versa. We were held amazed at our 'lost waif's' speed, strength and manoeuvrability in the air. Aerodynamically a Red-necked Phalarope must be superbly designed. RBS has seen many Red-necked Phalaropes, but never one flying as this bird did over Mangere.

This bird is known to have stayed at the same pools for at least four days. After its presence was noised abroad many went to see it. Human beings, laden with optical equipment, and speaking in hushed tones, were treated with indifference. On 7 June Gillian Eller, Joan Sibson and RBS watched it actively feeding at the same pools, especially liking the still water alongside a low, newly made scoria road. On 8 June Robin Child had little difficulty photographing it in colour. Among at least a dozen admirers on the afternoon of 9 June were Ken Bond, Mr and Mrs K.P. Duff, and Karen Duff, Nola Dyson, Brian Gill, Mike and Sharon Graham, Dr and Mrs Gordon Nicholson, Michael Taylor and Geoff Moon, who naturally was very usefully employed with his camera. When the first of us arrived that afternoon, the local stilts had been joined by other unusual visitors, namely a near all-black stilt and four Spur-winged Plovers. So many people so close was too much for them, and they smartly left, but the phalarope stayed on feeding with purposeful unconcern, while most of its audience stayed till the winter sun began to sink behind the Waitakeres. On 10 June Stephen Davies and Simon Towie spent some time closely watching it in the same place. It was not seen again.

In June adult Red-necked Phalaropes should be on their far distant breeding grounds. Remembering that the adult females are more brightly coloured than their mates, some who were able to take notes on this bird tentatively concluded, from the extent and pattern of the red on the neck, that it was an immature female, probably about a year old, or possibly two. How old are Red-necked Phalaropes normally when they first breed? Do flocks of immature non-breeders remain in equatorial waters when the adults go north? This appears to be only the fourth record of a Red-necked Phalarope in New Zealand.

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