

We saw no Blue Petrels or Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses on any of these passages and Grey Petrels only on the afternoon of 27 July, when we saw a maximum of three together.

During the afternoon of 5 August, between Cape Brett and Bream Head, the ship was struck by very strong westerly squalls, which must have been even stronger on the west coast of the North Island. It is possible that some of the Blue Petrels that had arrived in New Zealand coastal waters on 16/17 July had by 5 August been weakened by their inability to find proper food — possibly the reason why they do not normally occur in local waters — and were driven ashore by the squalls.

We thank Bert van Krieken, Port Meteorological Officer, Auckland, for his help with met. information, and Barrie Heather and Ralph Powlesland for their comments on this note.

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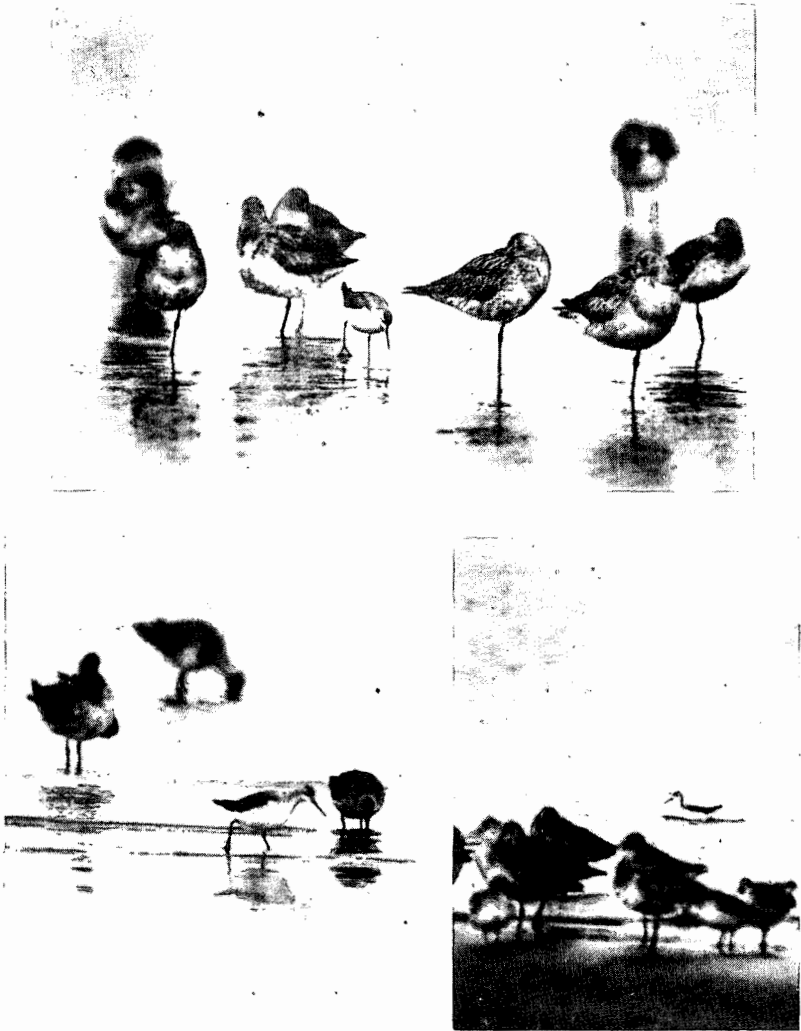
#### WILSON'S PHALAROPE AT MANAWATU RIVER ESTUARY — A NEW BIRD FOR NEW ZEALAND

On the morning of 25 September 1983 a count of waders was made at the Manawatu River estuary. It was evident that an influx had occurred since the previous day as Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) had increased from 10 to 57, Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) and Knot (*Calidris canutus*) had increased slightly, and four Least Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) had arrived.

Among the feeding waders on the exposed mud was an unusual bird clearly different from any of the 27 wader species which we had previously encountered at the estuary. Close observation for other than short periods was difficult, owing initially to the bird's position on the open mudflats and later, as the tide rose, to disturbance as yacht racing began. By midday, when M. K. Tarburton arrived in response to a phone call to the Manawatu RR, repeated disturbance had forced the wader flock to quit their normal high tide roost for a small sandspit close to the bar. Here the bird was found again, seen better, and photographed at a rather long range.

First impressions of the bird — yellowish legs and distinctive flight pattern with square white rump, lack of wingbar and feet protruding beyond the tail — suggested a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*). However, certain features were not entirely consistent with this species, particularly the lack of spotting on back and wings, the distinct head pattern, and the very thin bill.

When studying the literature in the next few days, we could not fit these points within any of the plumage variations for the Lesser Yellowlegs. We therefore had to examine other possibilities, including species not previously recorded in New Zealand. Of the three other



Wilson's Phalarope at Manawatu River estuary

Photos L. J. Davies

species that seemed possible — Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*), Stilt Sandpiper (*Micropalama himantopus*) and Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) — only the last fitted the observed characteristics. This revised identification was passed to L. J. Davies (the Manawatu RR) who, together with S. E. and R. A. Creswell, saw the bird on 29 September and obtained additional field notes and photographs which confirmed this identification.

Several Wellington OSNZ members travelled to Foxton Beach on 1 and 2 October, but the bird had gone, probably because of disturbance from other activities on the estuary. M. Falconer reported that on 10 October the waders at the high-tide roost were deliberately put to flight on several occasions by trail bikes ridden by youths who are attracted to the area by a special off-road course set aside for their use in the adjacent dunes.

The bird was not seen again, but after RRs had been alerted to the possibility of other birds arriving in New Zealand, a second bird was reported at L. Ellesmere in mid-November, which was joined by a third in December (Sagar & Harrison, this issue). As both of these birds were reported as being in adult winter plumage and the bird seen at the Manawatu River estuary had the brownish underparts and dark crown of an immature, we believe that three birds were concerned.

Wilson's Phalarope is a bird of the Americas, breeding on the North American prairie lands from central California north to British Columbia and east to Indiana and Ontario, and migrating to Chile, Argentina and the Falkland Islands for the southern summer. Over the past 25 years it has been recorded as an occasional vagrant to Britain and western Europe and since 1966 has been recorded on three occasions in Australia.

The detailed description which follows has been compiled from submissions made to the Rare Birds Committee by L. J. Davies, R. A. Creswell and J. L. and M. Moore.

*Size:* Compared with Knot, it looked very slightly shorter in overall length but of a much slighter build with a longer, more slender neck, a smaller head and a markedly longer, finer bill. Legs slightly longer but more flexed, giving a similar overall height.

*Head:* Crown dark grey-brown, becoming lighter grey on the nape and hind neck. A dark grey eyestripe starting just in front of the eye and extending back to merge with the grey nape. A narrow but well-defined white superciliary meeting over the bill but not extending on to nape. Lower cheeks, chin and front of neck white.

*Upperparts:* Mantle, back, scapulars and wing-coverts medium grey-brown shading to grey on the scapulars and to brown on the wing coverts; the paler grey of the hind neck extending as a light band down the centre of the mantle and on to the back. Primaries dark grey-brown, looking black at a distance.

*Underparts:* Neck, breast, belly, flanks and undertail uniform clean white except for a smudgy off-white area at sides of breast separated from the folded wings by a small white recess.

*Soft parts:* Eye dark and rather conspicuous. Bill black, very fine and thin, length about 1.5 x head. Legs, although at distance appearing brownish, at close range were greenish yellow tending to orange-yellow in bright light. Feet of similar colour and rather large and heavy for size of bird.

*Flight pattern:* Squarish white area on rump and upper tail not extending up the back between the wings. Wings uniformly dark with no wing bar, feet projecting beyond tail. Flight buoyant and rapid, usually above, or at the front of, the wader flock of about 150 birds.

*Behaviour:* A very active bird feeding almost continuously, even among the roosting Godwit and Knot, but occasionally resting on its belly on the sand. Used quick purposeful strides and rapid head movements to take food from the surface, more often to the side than to its front, and twice seen to take insects in the air. Also seen to wade in the shallow water and on several occasions to swim but not seen to 'spin' for food. Several roosting Godwits were seen to react antagonistically to close approaches by the feeding bird.

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#### WILSON'S PHALAROPES AT LAKE ELLESMERE

On 19 November 1983, Jason Hopkinson, Geoffrey Woodley and PMS were counting waders at the southern end of Kaitorete Spit, Lake Ellesmere, when we observed an unfamiliar wader. The bird was feeding actively in water up to its belly and was associated with Curlew Sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*). Our initial impression was of a very pale, active, medium-sized bird with a needle-fine bill. Both the feeding action and pale features of the bird were reminiscent of the Marsh Sandpipers (*Tringa stagnatilis*) we had seen at Lake Ellesmere in 1981. However, we eliminated this species when the bird eventually walked out of the water and we saw its relatively short-legged appearance. From observations to within 50 m for 40 min, using a 20-45X telescope, we identified the bird as a Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*).

*Size and appearance:* Slightly larger, more slender and elongate than a Curlew Sandpiper. Throughout the observation period the bird maintained a horizontal posture.

*Plumage:* White forehead, chin and lores. White supercilium, and dark grey line from behind eyes to nape. Grey crown, nape and neck, becoming light brown-grey on the back, upperwings and tail. Wing coverts finely edged with white; in the folded wing, the outer primary looked dark grey-black. The underparts, including undertail coverts, were white, except for a grey wash on the sides. It was noted that the white feathers of the flanks and sides extended over the leading edge of the folded wing. When the bird stretched its wings the underwing 'armpit' looked very pale but the other feathers were grey. In flight, a small, square, white rump was obvious, and the uppertail was grey. No wing bar was observed.